

I N D E P E N D E N T

EYE

SPRING 1990



GERMANY: OVER THE WALL

G

E

R

M

A

N

Y

CONTENTS

EXPERIMENTAL FILM IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY TODAY

by Alf Bold

2

'WE ARE ALL MONSTERS': An interview with BIRGIT HEIN

6

THE FILMS OF DORE O.

13

BERLIN SUPER 8: THE ARCHITECTURE OF DIVISION

by Keith Sanborn

20

'I WAS TIRED OF THE SUPER-8 GHETTO': An interview with STEFF ULRICH

31

DEATH, OBSESSION AND CINEMA:

An interview in two parts with MICHAEL BRYNNTRUP

by Mike Hoolboom and Steff Ulrich

37

GUNS, GIRLS AND GUERRILLAS: An interview with PENELOPE BUITENHUIS

42

FASCISM AND THE FANTASTIC: An interview with STEPHAN SACHS

50

'OKAY, THAT'S ENOUGH': An interview with KLAUS TELSCHER

58

'I'M NOT AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY': An interview with CLAUDIA SCHILLINGER

61

7 WEEKS IN EUROPE

by Owen O'Toole

66

STRANGE DEVELOPMENTS IN ECSTASY:

An interview with JOCHEN from SCHMELZ DAHIN

70

'YOU DESTROY EVERYTHING':

An Interview with JURGEN REBLE and CHRISTIANE HEUWINKEL

74

TAKE COURAGE: An Interview with MAIJA-LENE RETTIG

80

'PEOPLE ARE DYING IN FRONT OF YOUR SHOES':

An Interview with THOMAS LAUKS

84

OLD CHILDREN AND AIDS: An Interview with MATTHIAS MUELLER

89

ANNOUNCEMENTS

99

THE CFMDC WISHES TO
ACKNOWLEDGE THE SUPPORT
OF THE GOETHE INSTITUTE OF
TORONTO IN MAKING THIS
ISSUE POSSIBLE.

The Independent Eye is published by
the CANADIAN FILMMAKERS
DISTRIBUTION CENTRE, a non-profit
organization which promotes the work
of independent filmmakers. Operations
and activities undertaken by the
CFMDC are supported by its membership,
self-generated revenue, the
Canada Council, the Ontario Ministry
of Citizenship and Culture, the Ontario
Arts Council, the Department of
Cultural Affairs, Municipality of
Metropolitan Toronto and the City of
Toronto through the Toronto Arts
Council.

The Independent Eye is published
three times per year.
Subscriptions are \$10/year.
ISSN 0225-9192

Editor: MIKE HOOLBOOM
Assistant Editors: PAUL COUILLARD,
JAMES MACSWAIN
Designer: PETER DUDAR

CFMDC STAFF
Administrator: PAUL COUILLARD
Bookkeeper: MARY BECKER
Booker/Technician:
BARBARA GOSLAWSKI
Education Film Officer:
JAMES MACSWAIN
Experimental Film Officer:
DARIA STERMAC
Media Literacy Co-ordinator:
KRISTA GREVSTAD

THE INDEPENDENT EYE
VOL. 11 #2/3 Spring 1990

CANADIAN FILMMAKERS
DISTRIBUTION CENTRE
67A Portland Street Toronto, Ontario,
Canada M5V 2M9
(416) 593-1808

Front cover photo:
PENELOPE BUTTENHUIS

HOW GERMAN IS IT? an introduction by MIKE HOOLBOOM

It is by now a commonplace that ~~avant-garde~~ film has proceeded by fits and starts over the course of this century. Germany is certainly no exception. The abstract experiments of Oskar Fischinger, Viking Eggeling, Moholy-Nagy, and Hans Richter were largely products of the 1920s, while the next thirty years are nearly silent. It was the generation of 1968 that provided the impetus for present day production, a generation that would eventually build a country-wide system of independent cinemas (or *kommunale kinos*), establish state subsidies for independent work of every stripe, and kick start the indigenous production of features, documentaries and the ~~avant-garde~~. Inspired by the New American Cinema, filmmakers across the country took up Bolexes, turned bars into cinemas, and argued that the shape of our sight, the ways of our seeing, formed an urgent political agenda that could only be answered by a radically material cinema. By the mid-70s this 'movement' had been reduced to just a few practitioners whose increasingly esoteric concerns were canonized in a 1977 exhibition entitled 'Film as Film'.

This entire period in German ~~avant-garde~~ film, roughly from 1968-77, is called 'structural', a word which is used in Germany in a very particular way, meaning neither what Levi-Strauss or P. Adams Sitney intended. Instead it denotes a specific historical period where formal concerns took precedence over matters of content, and a period which stands as the predecessor to all that has followed. While work from this time has been widely shown and discussed, its 'project' is understood to be finished, and present day works employing strategies of a dozen years before are impatiently dismissed as being 'out of touch'.

The early '80s witnessed an enormous boom in super-8 production led by squatters in Berlin. Their integration of counter-culture politics, art and lifestyle continue to ensure a unique setting for the work of ~~avant-garde~~ film. The growing piles of newspaper reports testify not only to the variety of places and practices but to a different kind of cultural consensus surrounding the production of small gauge artisanal work. It is a work that has followed a cultural diaspora, spreading throughout the whole of Germany, with an emphasis on independent means, a suspicion of institutions and a deeply founded fear of centralization. The fabulous variety of makings that dot the German landscape are just the latest chapter in a restless overturning of avant-garde conventions whose structures and sensibilities have been designed to accommodate the present. This stands in marked contrast to the North American ~~avant-garde~~, which has been largely bent on restaging the history of a single generation of ~~avant-garde~~ filmmakers.

The most important 'structural' difference between Germany

and North America remains obvious: Germany lacks a centralized distribution service.

If North Americans are concerned about the life/death of their present day ~~avant-garde~~, it is only because of the existence of centralized distribution agencies like the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, New York Filmmakers Co-op and Canyon Cinema. While these organizations exist, in theory, to make artists' work accessible to all takers, they serve in fact as clearing houses for the post secondary classroom. Over 90% of all the rentals of these three organizations are derived from income issued by universities, art colleges and the like, indication enough that the ~~avant-garde~~ has become an increasingly closed, hermetic and exclusive concern. A distribution system based on 'educational values' necessarily favors a small canon of films and filmmakers, choosing to replay a select handful of anointed films over and over again. In Canada this practise is coupled with the collapse of the Funnel (an ~~avant-garde~~ film theatre/production centre), an almost complete dearth of theatrical exhibition, an impossible TV climate and production funds which have become increasingly threatened by the aspirations of feature filmmakers. Despite its vast geography and seeming obsession with landscape in film there is little ~~avant-garde~~ work to speak of outside the city centres of Vancouver and Toronto. Filmers in these two cities seem caught by the canon mongering film theologians on the one hand, and the hype artists on the other, dismissed by the first as irrelevant punk trash with no understanding of art and by the second as too esoteric. North America's distribution co-ops allied with the post-secondary school system have put into place a powerful conservative agenda that has established terms of reference, lines of heritage, career opportunities and schools of thought which mitigates against the present day achievements of new filmmakers.

What makes German work any different? Its insistence on the importance of super-8 ensures a material accessibility 16mm could never secure. A large and varied festival circuit exists as a place for filmmakers to showcase new work before large audiences, and meet with other filmmakers. A country wide network of independent theatres called *kommunale kinos* regularly program alternative work of every stripe, including ~~avant-garde~~ film. Film co-ops exist in many cities to provide equipment. The ~~avant-garde~~ doesn't find itself isolated in a couple of overheated and competitive centres but is spread throughout the country. More importantly, the deep sense of engagement that informs so much of the German work speaks of an urgency and necessity that continues to motivate this country's turbulent political scene. If West Germany has turned from regarding its Eastern neighbor as the Other, and now sees only itself, this political reflection will do much to change the shape of a changing Europe, the shape of things to come.

G

E

R

M

A

N

Y

**EXPERIMENTAL FILM IN
THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY
TODAY**



THE INDEPENDENT EYE

by ALF BOLD (1984)
translated by PETER GREEN

1. SITUATION-PRODUCTION

EXPERIMENTAL FILM IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY HAS EXPERIENCED AN ASTONISHING BOOM OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS. ITS STYLISTIC RANGE EXTENDS FROM EXPERIMENTAL FEATURE FILM, VIA NEW FORMS OF DOCUMENTARY, TO NEW IDEAS IN THE REALM OF ABSTRACT AND ANIMATION FILM. ALL FORMATS ARE USED, INCLUDING 35MM, 16MM, SUPER-8 AND VIDEO. MANY OF THE FILMMAKERS ALSO INCORPORATE AN ELEMENT OF PERFORMANCE INTO THEIR FILM WORK OR WORK WITH INSTALLATIONS. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF THESE NEW FORMS OF FILM.

One decisive reason for this flowering of experimental cinema that has not received much attention so far would seem to me to be connected with the decline of conventional narrative cinema. There is a growing mistrust of indus-

trially standard-
ized cinema
forms. As a result,
productions that only a few years ago would have

been seen by no more than a circle of insiders are not only receiving much greater attention from the critics, but in part find their way into 'normal' cinemas; and in many cases they achieve a surprising success (e.g. Werner Nekes' *Uliisses*, or the films of Elfi Mikesch and Ulrike Ottinger).

The liberal federal and regional film support system in Germany has of course played a decisive role in these positive developments in the realm of experimental film over the last few years. It has enabled even outsiders to make films that contribute to the overall development of the medium and that would not have been possible without support. Although feature films still receive the lion's share of the funds from

the Federal Ministry of the Interior, even here there are a number of striking examples of unconventional work that has received support (Rose von Praunheim, Werner Schroeter, Ulrike Ottinger, Elfi Mikesch, Jean-Marie Straub/Daniele Huillet). Opportunities for young filmmakers of all stylistic currents were improved when regional support was increased and film offices set up in a number of the federal states. For the first time short film and experimental film projects could also reckon on a greater measure of support. There is scarcely a German filmmaker who has not profited from these facilities.

It is not enough, of course, merely to improve production conditions. Films also have to be shown. Here too, however, there has been a change for the better. Experimental works have increasingly found access to the programs of film festivals. Since its foundation in 1971, the 'Internationales Forum des jungen Films' (International Forum for New Films) at the Berlin Film Festival has seen it as its duty to present films that extend and redefine the language of cinema.

There is scarcely a German filmmaker whose work has not been shown here. Dore O., Elfi Mikesch, Ulrike Ottinger, Noll Brinckmann, Silke Grossmann, Birgit and Wilhelm Hein, Jean-Marie Straub/Daniele Huillet, Werner Nekes, Heinz Emigholz, Klaus Wyborny, Rüdiger Neumann, Rotraut Pape, Vlado Kristl, to mention but a few, have all presented their work here over the years. As early as 1973 space was made for video and Super-8 films, and this has continued to expand.

The West German short film festival (Kurzfilmtage) in Oberhausen and the International Film Week in Mannheim always included experimental works in their programmes, although it is problematic there with video and Super-8. The founding of the Experimental Film Workshop in Osnabrück in 1980 represents a high-water mark in attempts to make experimental film more accessible to audiences. Every film submitted was shown (only in 1984 was it necessary to make a selection, due to the excessive number of films, but even then not many were sacrificed). Osnabrück soon

became a Mecca for filmmakers, cinemagoers, film people and journalists, a place where people could get to know each other and discuss in a relaxed atmosphere. The Experimental Film Workshop in Osnabrück is probably the most important institution for the promotion and presentation of those activities that take place on the fringe of the 'official' film scene in West Germany; (without this support they could not exist). It is all the more regrettable therefore that the authorities have not so far been able to make a decision to safeguard its existence.

Festivals and special events on their own, however, would scarcely be enough to make experimental cinema attractive to the public. Continuous work is necessary for this, and it cannot simply take account of German experimental film, but has to set it in a much larger international context. The various municipal cinemas (kommunale kinos) and other alternative places of showing films have dedicated themselves to this task for many years now - with various degrees of success. The Arsenal in Berlin, the Filmmuseum in Munich, the Metropolis in Hamburg, and the municipal cinemas in Frankfurt, Hanover, Stuttgart and Freiburg, amongst others, reserve a more or less major part of their programs for the showing of films that attempt to create a new cinematographic language. It is important, however, to set these works in the context of film history, and not merely to include them in programs as events for insiders. (In its permanent program 'The History of Cinema in 150 Films', for example, the Arsenal has naturally incorporated a number of experimental films, beginning with works by Richter, Ruttman, Eggeling, Fischinger, Bunuel, Clair, etc. and continuing down to Ken Jacobs and Hollis Frampton). New forms of presentation have also facilitated the promotion of experimental films in the last few years: screenings in alternative places of showing, in cafes or at concerts. For a time in Berlin there were even small cinemas in houses occupied by squatters, the programs of which revealed a great degree of vitality. They also helped to gain new audiences for experimental films. Seminars were held, workshops and even festivals organized.

None of these phenomena, however,



justifies a description of the situation as a flowering of German experimental cinema. The names of the filmmakers mentioned so far represent a generation that has long since 'come of age'. It is to their credit that many of them became teachers at the two German film schools (in Berlin and Munich), or that they accepted invitations to teach at



German schools of art and vocational schools of higher education. Here too an incredible new dimension has opened up. At the German Academy for Film and Television in Berlin a whole series of works have been created over the last year that have disproved the reputation of this school as a stronghold of political films. Rosi S.M., Ute Aurand, Ulrike Pfeiffer, Monika Funke-Stern, Christoph Dreher, Verena Rudolph, RS Wolkenstein were able to try out new forms here, and produced quite exceptional works.

In Hamburg, which had always been a city with a many-sided experimental film production, both quantitatively and qualitatively (Klaus Wyborny, Heinz Emigholz, Rüdiger Neumann live and work there), a whole row of new talents has emerged from the School of Arts; Rotraut Pape, Birger Bustorff, Oliver Hirschbiegel, Axel Schaffler are the best known amongst them.

The film classes at the School of Arts in Brunswick - a city that possesses a wonderful collection of old master paintings, but has otherwise never been of great prominence in the realm of art - is perhaps the most astonishing phenomenon of all in the field of experimental film in West Germany. Under the aegis of Gerhard Buttenbender, initially in his capacity as head of the film class and later as rector of the school, a great deal of activity was generated, and talents were nurtured that, since they were so unexpected, attracted a great deal of attention and succeeded in carrying off fame and prizes with their films at various festivals. In this context one might mention the names of Hiltrut Köhne, Christoph Janetzko, Alf Olbrisch, Klaus Telscher and Walter Hettich.

In Frankfurt too, the centre of banking and finance in Germany, the situation has changed over the past few years. Before Udo Serke and Peter Kubelka

were called to the schools of art as instructors, the city had never been of significance as a centre for the production of experimental films. All of a sudden filmmakers such as Pola Reuth, Walter Baumann, Karl Kels and others appeared on the scene. Noll Brinckmann represents a special case here. She made her first film, *The West Village Meat Market*, when she was already 40. Previously she had attracted attention purely on the basis of a few profound articles she had written. Since 1979 she has made six short films in all, none of them longer than ten minutes, but which, in their powerful brevity and intensity represent a singular and highly original chapter in the history of feminist experimental film, incomparable with anything else. They are films that give rise to a sense of consternation. Noll Brinckmann's work is that of an individualist and the product of a desolate environment. On occasion her films can also make one laugh; but it is the kind of laughter that, although it does not stick in the throat, one regrets when it is over, for there is really nothing to laugh at.

Activities in the realm of experimental film are not limited to the bigger cities mentioned here, however. In Stuttgart, for example, Hennelore Kober and Jonnie Döbele together with a number of other young people have developed a series of interesting activities. Frank Zander and the organizers of the 'Experi-Nixperi' festival in Bonn are not merely concerned with showing films. They also make films themselves, animation and collage films that are in part extremely beautiful and imaginative. Among the organizers of the experimental film workshop in Osnabrück described earlier, Heiko Dax has also proved to be a gifted filmmaker.

In many towns and cities filmmakers have formed groups that collaborate, make joint appearances, and even live together in some instances. I should like to mention two of these groups as an example. They are not only the most unusual ones, but also the most talented. In 1982 when the West German Short Film Festival organized an open discussion on film support measures between filmmakers and the representatives of various organizations, a young man went up to the microphone, proceeded to abuse the participants to the discussion,

and turned the hearing into a happening. His name was Bertram Jersinsky from the 'Anarchistische Gummizelle Düsseldorf' (Anarchist Rubber Cell), which therewith made its first appearance on an international stage. The 'Anarchistische Gummizelle' comprises a number of young people (no one knows exactly how many), who have joined forces to shoot Super-8 films with a subversive humour and make appearances as a performance group. Admittedly, one is never quite sure at these events where the whole thing will end. The performances have an anarchic beauty about them, and are a naive combination of music, film and theatre. On occasion they are also a flop, in which case it is again refreshing to see how an ambitious program is simply broken off because it does not work. At all events it is anarchic.

The second group is the 'Notorisches Reflexe' (Notorious Reflexes) from Berlin, which has a whole storey to itself in a factory building in that city, where it works and makes its presentations. Knut Hoffmeister, Christoph Doering, Sacha von Oertzen, Volker Rendschmidt and the other members of the group regard their films as part of a much broader area of activities. 'Notorisches Reflexe' has now made a name for itself as a good New Wave band, and its appearances are in the nature of special events, at which films are flashed in and sometimes projected onto paper screens hanging in the hall, which are then ignited during the performance. Or the musicians sometimes appear in white outfits, reminiscent of the clothing worn by astronauts, using them as film projection surfaces. The group's greatest success to date, (also on disc), is the *Brezhnev Rap*, in which a speech on the construction of socialism is accompanied by rap rhythms. In a film of the same title made by Knut Hoffmeister one sees the head of Brezhnev in black and white with the montage of an animated red-lipped female mouth apparently speaking the words. Intercut between this are everyday scenes from modern Moscow. The film is refreshing and disrespectful, questioning all officialdom and authority, and probably only of limited value in terms of promoting understanding between peoples.

In view of the great number and range of films being produced, it is amazing

OVER THE WALL

that there is no functioning distribution network. Attempts to set up a co-operative along the lines of the co-ops existing in New York or London in the '60s failed (not only in West Germany, incidentally, but in a number of other European countries as well). Distribution is therefore based either on the personal initiative of the filmmakers themselves, or on the enthusiasm of individual persons. Furthermore, the cost of printing copies in West Germany is so high that it is virtually impossible to implement the co-op principle. Hardly any of the filmmakers can afford to have a sufficient number of copies made to hand over one to a co-operative.

In the Super-8 sector the Gegenlicht Verleih (in Essen and Berlin) has been working for some time now as a distribution organization. Its program selection includes a mixture of experimental, feature and political Documentary films. The Freunde der Deutschen Kinemathek in Berlin also has a whole row of films available for distribution, but here too,

as one



can

see from
the programs
in its own Arsenal
cinema, the selection
is more international. Ingo
Petzke, who was formerly in

Osnabrück and is now in Wurzburg, runs a distribution organization under the name of 'Cine Pro', offering a large number of German films. Among these, the works of Dore O., Werner Nekes, Bastian Cleve and the German-Australian Paul Winkler are strongly represented. By and large, however, one can safely conclude that the distribution situation is a desolate one, and is left largely to the personal initiatives of the individual filmmakers.

2. STYLISTIC DIVERSITY

NOT SURPRISINGLY, IN VIEW OF THE VARIETY OF PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES DESCRIBED ABOVE, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REDUCE GERMAN EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA TO A SINGLE COMMON DENOMINATOR. A DIVISION INTO FEA-

TURE, DOCUMENTARY AND ANIMATION FILMS DOES NOT HELP EITHER. MOST GERMAN EXPERIMENTAL FILMS ARE HYBRID FORMS, HAVING A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING. That applies both to longer films and to the short films.

Sometimes one can observe certain common features amongst filmmakers who are working independently of each other and in different cities. In a whole row of films one finds an aesthetic that would seem to be borrowed from advertising film (Rotraut Pape, R.S. Wolkenstein, Hannelore Kober/Jonnie Döbele, Pola Reuth). They use images that are beautiful and meant to please. They are subversive in that they take the aesthetics of advertising films to the point of absurdity, because they are not trying to sell anything.

The 'diary film' is also a genre one finds in West Germany, but in contrast to American and French experimental cinema, as well as private information, it also contains elements that go beyond the purely personal. The films of Klaus Telscher, Knut Hoffmeister, Christoph Doering, Hiltrut Köhne, Walter Hettich, Cynthia Beatt, and Wilhelm and Birgit Hein reveal the filmmakers in what are often extreme situations. The inclusion of staged sequences and influences from the realm of performance also creates space for fantasy in the private realm. The most extreme example of a diary film is provided by Heinz Emigholz in his *The Basis of Make Up*, which took the term 'diary film' quite literally and in so doing, translated it to a completely different plane. For twenty minutes he filmed the pages of his diaries in stop frame technique. They are minor works of art consisting of drawings, collages and written passages. The viewer obtains only a vague idea of the richness of this filmmaker's life, however, for everything occurs far too quickly to be able to take it in.

A unique aspect of German experimental film is the tendency to tell stories; but since the conventional manner of narration in the cinema is mistrusted, this trend to story-telling manifests itself in the most diverse forms. Even directors whose roots lie more in the realm of 'traditional' cinema, are attempting to find new bearings. Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet have distilled a film

version from Kafka's novel *America* that attempts to capture the fragmentary quality of the book and its radical narrative form. From the very outset Werner Schroeter, Rose von Praunheim, Vlado Kristl, Ulrike Ottinger and Elfi Mikesch, to mention but a few, attempted in their narrative films to break up or suspend the continuity of space and time. They compelled audiences to seek their own stories. Intentions of this kind are also to be found today in the films of Bettina Woernle, Birger Bustorff, Rotraut Pape, Pola Reuth, Noll Brinckmann, Sebastian Cleve, Werner Nekes, Dore O., Monika Funke-Stern and others. The means they use to achieve these ends differ considerably; they include re-working with an optical printer, montage, the insertion of noises, speech and sound, asynchronism of sound and picture, or a mixture of documentary and fictitious elements.

In many cases experimental films adopt a political stance; or the political film uses experimental techniques. Werner Schroeter's film about the Philippines, *Der Lackende Stern*, is perhaps the most successful example of an explicitly political documentary film, using a new cinematographic language. Further examples one could mention are the films of Monika Funke-Stern and Cynthia Beatt. The Super-8 films of the 'Notorisches Reflexe' group in Berlin, of the 'Anarchistische Gummizelle Dusseldorf', of Brigitte Buhler and Dieter Hormel, of Helmut Girardet, and Rosi S.M. all belong to the political sphere, since, with their anarchistic tendencies, they radically question our present day social realities.

I should like to dedicate these thoughts on German experimental film to the memory of the actress Magdalena Montezuma, the significance of whose contribution to the regeneration of German cinema since 1968 - initially in the films of Werner Schroeter and then in those of Rosa von Praunheim, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Elfi Mikesch and Ulrike Ottinger - is not yet fully measurable. She died, only 41 years of age, on 15 July 1984 in Berlin - an irreplaceable loss to German cinema.

G

E

R

M

A

N

Y

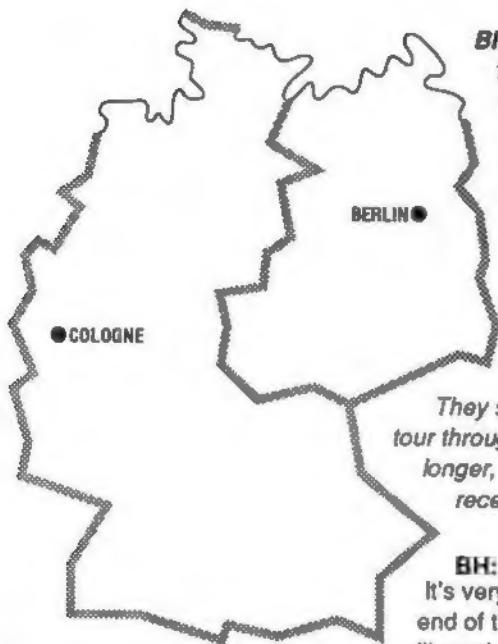
WE ARE ALL

KALI FILM



MONSTERS

AN INTERVIEW
WITH
BIRGIT HEIN



BIRGIT HEIN was born in Berlin in 1942. She met Wilhelm Hein in 1959. From 1962 both studied in Cologne; Birgit studied art history while Wilhelm studied sociology. They married in 1964 and began joint film work two years later, abandoning their studies. Their first film was accepted for the fourth International Experimental Film Competition in Knokke, Belgium, 1967-8. In the spring of 1968, together with other filmmakers and film journalists they founded X Screen - the first exhibition venue for avant-garde film in Germany. Their first international success came with Rohfilm in 1968. In 1971 the paperback Film im Underground by Birgit Hein appeared - the first German-language publication on the subject of underground film. From 1973 to 1977 Birgit Hein undertook various teaching assignments. In 1977 they assumed the direction of the film section of the Dokumenta 6, staging the exhibition Film as Film.

They subsequently abandoned formal/material filmmaking, and began a performance tour through Germany and the United States. After the tour they began concentrating on longer, more narrative work. They are recently separated.

BH:

It's very interesting the development of experimental film in Germany. It started at the end of the 1960s, it was called the 'other' cinema. By 1970 there were about 100 filmmakers and later it collapsed completely. In 1968 there was a political movement in

Europe and North America and as well a new film movement, new people working with new media. Some became feature film directors from '68 like Schroeter, Praunheim, Fassbinder and Wenders, many vanished and a few remained with experimental film: Klaus Wyborny, Werner Nekes, Dore O., Heinz Emigholz, Bastian Cleve, Lutz Mommartz and Wilhelm and I. This was all that remained by the mid-seventies of the people who were making work in the 1960s. Cleve and Mommartz were strong in 1968 but their later work was not so interesting, whereas the rest of us, the other five I mentioned, had a very strong and interesting development, from formal film to narrative. Then at the end of the 1970s a new generation of filmmakers came, it was a super-8 movement, and they didn't come from this historical background like we did, with the New American Cinema and so on. They were the media generation, they grew up with television. By the end of the seventies filmmakers also began coming out of the art schools, not many taught it, maybe two or three, but it was another place.

MH:

The first generation of filmmakers - were you all teaching in art schools by the mid-70s?

BH:

Only Nekes. Others who weren't that radical got the jobs, you understand? But anyhow, having this teaching in the art schools brought the tradition back, the history was shown. This brought the two movements - from the '60s and '70s, together. I was invited very often to do seminars, the old people brought the history back, but these new people opened the film movement. Since the 1980s it's really flourishing, people have a lot of information, and a lot of people make work. There's a lot of talking. In the beginning of the 1980s new contacts were made amongst filmmakers in festivals like Osnabrück. After a long period there was no Knokke Film Festival any more, and these festivals were a place to come together. Then there were these Berlin people, Berlin was very important, they started the InterFilm Festival. They started cinemas in the squatted houses. Kino Eiszeit was one of these. They started a new sub-culture. I met Jurgen Bruning here in Osnabrück, he started Kino Eiszeit with others, he was very young and very far out and he invited *Love Stinks* to play in this squatted house and it was like a new life had started, it was just wonderful. This is why I was so angry in Toronto at the Film Congress when people of my generation were saying nothing had happened, the movement is dead. It's absolutely bullshit. Tremendously creative powers have developed in the 1980s.

MH:

I think that's more of an American understanding - that the American project seems to have come to an end, that no similar swell of new work seems to be able to take the place of the old. Their history has a terrible need, it kills everything. But the new people in Germany - are they mostly coming out of the art academies?

BH:

Not only that, but rarely out of the film schools. Normally film schools don't bring out new talent, they make documentaries or drama. If it's inventive or experimental it comes from the art schools. For instance Klaus Telscher and Claudia Schillinger studied in Bremen, Rotraut Pape studied in Hamburg, Christoph Janetzko, Straacke, Brynntrup studied in Braunschweig, Stephan Sachs in Dusseldorf.

MH:

When you started making work in the 1960s, where would you show it?

BH:

There was only the commercial market, commercial cinemas, nobody ever thought of presenting something else, so we organized it ourselves. Wilhelm and I and other filmmakers and film journalists made a place called 'X Screen'. We started our first screening in March 1968,

renting a cinema for night screenings. Cinemas weren't going very well so it was easy to rent.

MH:

How many people would come out?

BH:

Sometimes we had over 1,000 people. I remember Larry Kardish when he came from MOMA with Andy Warhol's work he couldn't believe it, and this was the time it was called underground and just the promise of a bare tit would start a line up. Then we showed Ken Jacobs and 20 people came.

MH:

Did you receive any money for putting on programs?

BH:

No, it was completely private so we also ran porno films. We got money by showing illegal films.

MH:

And you showed mostly German work?

BH:

No, we started very much avant-garde. The first screenings were Vienna avant-garde, then German and American. We had everybody coming to that place. Very soon after X-Screen started others began in Munich and Hamburg, and more came afterwards. This was long before the community cinemas, the Kommunale Kinos. It was all private

initiative when we showed these films in 1968-70, we had to make it a club because of the censorship laws at that time, and everyone had to be a member. When I was in Vancouver in Dec. 1987 all the people who wanted to see the women's program had to become members so it was the same again.

MH:

What about the Kommunale Kinos - what are they and how did it start?

BH:

In the middle of the 70s the Kommunale Kinos were established, one after another. People were aware that cinema should be subsidized and film history should be shown. The generation of 1968 was the first film freak generation, the first generation to be seriously interested in film and film history which was completely neglected before. Some of these people got into TV which changed as a result, they showed historical programs, auteur retrospectives... Others remained filmmakers and still others ran the Kommunale Kinos.

MH:

Is the Kommunale Kino like an art house, a rep theatre?

BH:

Yeah, it gets some money from the government. German culture is subsidized by the government - theatre, opera houses, none of these places are running economically. So finally after years and years some film theatres are subsidized, some have more money some have less.

MH:

But is it started by individuals and then the government supports it or...?

BH:

Normally it's private initiative at the beginning.

MH:

Are they spread all over Germany and can you show your work there?

BH:

It's not the only place, of course, because the Kommunale Kinos rarely show independent films, some like it more than others. As well, there are independently run small cinemas which show independent work, there's a lot



LOVE STINKS

O V E R T H E W A I L

of them all over Europe.

MH:

But don't the Kommunale Kinos have a mandate to show German work or independent work?

BH:

(horrified) No. They decide what they show. The program is completely up to the person who runs it. For example in Dusseldorf the head is very friendly with the French Cinematheque so they run a lot of French films, and they're friendly with the experimental filmmakers so they have regular screenings while the others may have them only once in a while. The government controls the places only by money, some need income so they have to play popular films, but others are completely subsidized. Then we also have these half Kommunale Kinos, maybe they get the rent free, but everything else is their private concern. So there are different models of Kommunale Kinos and the best of course are the fully subsidized. The numbers change. Once there were 120 Kommunale Kinos in Germany, which I couldn't believe, but then you find that some get very little support.

MH:

Why would all of them show experimental work? This is always the first work that gets left behind.

BH:

All of them were film freaks in '68 which was a political time, and experimental film was just coming in, and all of them were interested in the New American Cinema. That was the first connection to experimental film. Some had started showing work in '64. When they got into their jobs some distant feeling from this early time remains.

MH:

London Filmmakers Co-op regularly rotates job positions to ensure one person can't stay too long, a system which has benefits and disadvantages. How does it work in the Kommunale Kinos?

BH:

The same people work from the beginning of the cinemas. These people are very fanatic, it's not a job, it's a life dedication.

MH:

What were you doing in the middle of the '70s?

FORBIDDEN IMAGES



■■■

Nothing. The middle of the '70s was very dry. This was the lowest point in experimental film for everyone. There was no interest any more, a change in climate. Suddenly people realized they couldn't live making experimental film and most left. There were about 100 in 1969, enormous activity, and maybe five left in 1974. People went into business. Some understood they would stay to make political films, and very few remained to make experimental work.

MH:

I'm wondering about the few people left making work in the seventies. Did this common experience of survival show itself in a common style of filmmaking - as if you'd reached the same conclusions?

■■■

Not at all. In 1968 when this broad movement came about it was all called experimental, but few really were. We knew that sooner or later most would make stories, and shortly after there were just a few working on structural film, formal problems. I would say after the Knokke Film Festival in 1974 - that was a very heavy psychological shock. We didn't get any recognition with our *Structural Studies*, Dore O. got the main prize. Her film was good, nice, but it was

again a re-affirmation of the New American Cinema, not the recognition of new ideas.

MH:

What were you doing in *Structural Studies* - what is the difference between this and the New American Cinema?

■■■

It was a completely different kind of thinking, a different kind of aesthetic - the destruction and dismembering of art. We were connected with the avant-garde movements in art and political thinking, trying to discuss society and art through film. Our work was anti-aesthetic and anti-ruling-avant-garde, which is difficult in such a specialized area as experimental film. Then we organized the Dokumenta 'Film as Film' exhibition in 1977 and this was the end of formal film work.

■■■

How did you see the link between a formal practice of film and a political practice?

BH:

The hope was that somehow radical avant-garde practice could affect society. After awhile we understood that what we were discussing was anti-art, and that it would all lead, like Dada or Fluxus, to a discussion within the art frame. What you were destroying could only be under-

stood by the art society. No one outside the codes understood the work. This was the problem of the separation of art and life, you want to get your life with your art but you can't. So something has to change.

MH:

But was there a moment when that wasn't true?

BH:

No. There was a time when people were running into the cinema of '68 just because they were curious, but they didn't understand. It didn't make a difference. Finally you have to admit that this is not the way to effect political change in society. You have to move towards content.

MH:

You made quite a lot of work in that time - what kind of difference did it make then?

BH:

It was just a process for ourselves to get clearer. In the end we reached a point of discussion where very very few people could understand it. It's comparable to people working in mathematics and in the end you have four or five people who know it, and it's so boring if you lose the content, no one understands, it's absolutely alienating, it's terrible.

MH:

Were you working in a different way than Nekes and Dore O.?

BH:

Yes, of course, because we were more radical formally and intellectually. And this leads one very easily into a very extreme position. And then we didn't feel comfortable any more. Then we discovered the image, reality, which we hadn't done before. We hadn't been shooting material ourselves because we always took material. Found footage, photographs, anything that was already there. But never shooting real life ourselves. Then we stopped making films and began a performance in 1978 - we went out of the art circles to perform. We

traveled around the country in a car and performed in German pubs, and later we did this 1979 tour in U.S. museums: Carnegie Institute, Albright Knox (laughs). There were many screens with films and slides and we performed in front. We took images from the trivial cinema, from Hollywood and changed them. We found these big paper dolls of Superman and Wonder Woman and made them move like puppets. We had them masturbate. This performance was very much getting into life after ten years of structural film. Can you understand it, can you imagine it?

MH:

So you performed a series of actions that responded to the images behind you?

BH:

For example one piece began with the trailer for *From Here to Eternity*, we found it in 35mm and reduced it to 16mm. Then we showed a discarded TV clip about Vietnam which shows soldiers taking bodies out of the water and cleaning their clothes. Afterwards I cleaned a helmet onstage. In the same show we were dealing with Mickey

Mouse, with Superman and Wonderwoman and Frankenstein, going from one emotion to another.

MH:

In this performance, is there anything from structural film left?

BH:

No, this was after structural film.

MH:

But you'd been working in film all this time - was it a complete break for you?

BH:

No, the problem of image and reality was one problem of the structural film, but this worked physically, not in such a didactic way. The whole show was built up on illusion - how does it work in an image - and what is reality in the mind. As I step in front of the screen dressed as the Frankenstein monster - am I more real than the monster constructed on the screen? Of course it meant more - that we are all monsters (laughs). It was a very emotional performance. But our so-called structural films, for instance *Portraits*, were very personal, but only a few people understood that. We felt very alienated from the audience because



FORBIDDEN IMAGES

O V E R T H E W A L L

they couldn't understand the imagery we were using for structural film, personal imagery in a formal context. Therefore it was necessary to change the work because what we wanted was to communicate, we had to find another

saw the life there the performance wasn't enough for us. Because life was stronger. Slowly, slowly we started getting into that film. There was no script, after a long time of sitting we started shooting, shooting, shooting. In the end

real, real fucking, at the same time they understood the construction. There are very few films that have this power.

MH:

Can you describe the film?

BH:

I don't feel like it. Why?

MH:

For people who haven't seen it.

BH:

It doesn't help. You can't describe films, it's better to talk in abstract terms because the images are what is most important and this is something you can't describe.

MH:

But wouldn't you say that, using the 'Film as Film' exhibition as a line, one of the big changes is your relation to the word.

MH:

But *Love Stinks* is without words. There's one text of a priest, a few radio texts but no dialogue, only music. It's completely non-verbal. With *Forbidden Pictures* it's different because Wilhelm is telling his dreams. But there's no synchronous sound in any of the films...

MH:

Forbidden Pictures seems like a science film, asking different people to enact the forbidden in their lives. It shows a series of transgressions - centering on the figure of a man who always returns alone to his apartment to listen to the radio. His surround is episodic, these intervening and dramatized moments of transgression, but he seems quite passive, images alternately horrible and fascinating pass through him but it's difficult to say how it changes him. He seems like the audience.

BH:

This comes out of Wilhelm's life, getting into his personality. The black and white images were a reconstruction of his past - the film was mainly about Wilhelm losing his voice. After we separated I saw this film again in Toronto and I was really struck by the truth of everything in it. It was incredible, the film really depicted a situation that intuition handled to become true, it was so strange.

MH:

But it's not a straight autobiography.

MH:

I wrote the script about Wilhelm - stories about the family and situations. It's one part of one person's head. It's a psychogram.



WILHELM

way to get to the audience.

MH:

Was the audience not so important before?

MH:

It was always important. The point was always communication, when we found we had the wrong audiences in the art world this was very disturbing. When people began to correspond with us, art world people, we didn't appreciate this, this wasn't the audience we wanted. So we changed our place - we went to the pubs.

MH:

How did people react to the performance?

BH:

We told the bartender that at one point in the show the light has to be completely dark, otherwise it won't work. If they turn off the light you know you're successful (laughs). But we couldn't go on forever, nobody would promote us, we had to do everything ourselves and after awhile we didn't like it any more. It ended when we had a grant to live one year in New York and made *Love Stinks*. We got the grant for the performance but as soon as we

we wound up with a big heap of material. The film was really constructed afterwards, it was a completely artificial construct.

MH:

What is the film interested in showing or expressing?

BH:

Alienation in a relationship and sex.

MH:

How does the sex fit in?

BH:

The biggest problem in alienation is sex.

MH:

Why's that?

BH:

It seems I have forgotten what this film is about (laughs). It's about a love that doesn't work or is endangered. First questioning of sexual relationships. I would see this film every time in a different light. The value of this film is that it's really dealing with real life and real problems and the courage to deal with it, so it's documentary and it's constructed, but at the same time it's real. And this was the impact of this film when we showed it in Germany, they were seeing fiction that was absolutely

MH:

What happens to a childhood experience when it's remade in film?

BH:

Of course you always construct an abstract situation. They're separate. It can never be the same image but it can approach the feeling which is the important thing.

MH:

But doesn't it change your relation to your own history?

BH:

No. This is another construct. These images transport real feelings even though they're constructed and this is most extraordinary and I would call this art. This is very important. As it is not precisely

MONSTERS

linked to historical events it comes very close to the feeling now. What these images really transported is a present. It's not like taking family photos and looking into my past. The film speaks now, of now. And now I'm working on a project which tries for a deeper connection. I want to connect mythical ideas to today, like how did people think about women 10,000 years ago and today.

Forbidden Pictures isn't connected with history, it reveals it, and this is how images are constructed. In Freud's *Totem and Taboo*, he really believes that this must have been a real event - the killing of the father, castration, sleeping with the mother. For me this is a psychological position - you have experiences in your life which never happened. Images of the psyche come from history.

MH:

But in your *Kali Film* you're very careful to illustrate Freudian ideas about penis envy by arranging pieces of B-films to show that the empowerment of women is linked with the gaining of the phallus. Over and over we watch women with these enormous knives. And it closes with the death of the father who is castrated. This is all very literal.

BH:

But these films are not reality. That's what's interesting in these trash films - the horror and prison films - they're not reality. These films are dealing with dreams and somehow they are true in a psychic way. If women can act like this in a film, it means society also believes

they can do that.

MH:

But the *Kali Film* is drawn from films made by men for men. They make a spectacle of women, tits hanging out everywhere, catfights, and it's not an image of empowerment, it's the reverse.

BH:

But they're killing, knifing, shooting, because there's a deep fear that these nice women might do this. If you don't control them, they kill you. This is like banning the danger - if you ban it, it's there.

MH:

But what struck me about the *Kali Film* is the way these women have been framed or set up so as to provide this entertainment - like a cat fight or a lesbian scene, it allows for a tremendous passivity and control and easiness, not anxiety - even more because they seem so much an image, rephotographed rasters of the image world, constructed not as women, but as types. They seem flat.

BH:

I don't know I like it. I found that interesting and revealing and I took it from so many films, tiny pieces. I like that image and the feeling about it. I can't discuss this in a controversial way because it's so simple. Even if these films are made by men I don't see the world as so separated, men's thinking is influenced by women's and the other way around. It's difficult for me to make this division because of the education. It was always different between upper and lower classes. Upper class women always had the same rights as men. Since the 19th century the rights for women have gone through all classes. But women were never completely subordinate, only a small class of women.

MH:

Is your film a part of that movement or struggle?

BH:

This film is dealing with deeper images that have always existed, in archetypal forms. Now, in the present time as women become more threatening, more films show threatening women, you can see it just from statistics. The *Kali Film* is also like a kind of statistic, about this fright coming, but it's also ancient.

MH:

If the *Forbidden Pictures* film is Wil-

helm's, is the *Kali Film* yours?

BH:

No, the next one I'm making is mine. The women's film was supposed to be one part of the new film - then all these other films developed and it became its own film.

MH:

Can you talk about the difference in audience response between *Forbidden Pictures* and the *Kali Film* - the man's film and the women's?

BH:

Not really, *Forbidden Pictures* is much deeper, the *Kali Film* is much broader. And the next film goes into deeper spheres.

BIRGIT AND WILHELM HEIN FILMOGRAPHY

1967 S & W (10 min.), *Und Sie?*

(10 min.)

1968 *Grun* (24 min.), *Bamberg* (15 min.), *Reproductions* (28 min)

1969 *625* (34 min.); *Work in Progress, Teil A* (37 min.)

1970 *Work in Progress, Teil B* (8 min.); *Auszuge aus einer Biographie* (6 min.); *Madison/Wis* (10 min.)

1970-2 *Portraits I* (50 min.); *Replay* (22 min.); *Fotofilm* (10 min.)

1971 *Work in Progress, Teil C* (23 min.); *Work in Progress, Teil D* (20 min.); *Doppelprojektion I-V* (50 min.); *Zoom lange Fassung* (21 min.); *Zoom kurze Fassung* (9 min.)

1972 *Liebesgrusse* (8 min.); *Yes to Europe* (15 min.); *Aufblenden/Abblenden* (24 min.); *Doppelprojektion Vi + VII* (25 min.); *Scharf/Unscharf* (6 min.); *Dokumentation* (25 min.) *Fussball* (60 min.)

1973 *Ausdatiertes Material* (50 min.); *God Bless America* (3 min.); *Stills* (75 min.); *London* (30 min.)

1974 *Structural Studies* (37 min.)

1975 *Doppelprojektion VIII-XIII* (25 min.); *Portraits II* (24 min.)

1976 *Materialfilme I* (45 min. 1-3 screen); *Materialfilme II* (35 min. 35mm)

1971-77 *Home Movies I - XXVI* (30 min.)

1978-79 *Verdammt In Alle Ewigkeit* (60 min.); *Das Konzert* (50 min.)

1982 *Love Stinks*

1986 *Forbidden Pictures*

1988 *Kali Film*

O V E R T H E W A L L I

THE FILMS OF

Dore O.



KASKARA

THE FILMS OF DORE O by MARTIN LANGBEIN

"A verbal approach to the films of Dore O. seems at first to be most inappropriate. They are somehow brittle, barbed, and defy a treatment in language - especially in the strict standards of discursive language. These films are conceivably unsuited to the bourgeois art set, which demands that the artistic be accompanied by a commentary in the written word. However, the viewer does not have need of a usage manual in order to discover in due time and without great effort the deeper profundities to be found in the films. The acceptance of Dore O.'s films is not dependent on the possession of a high

Dore O.



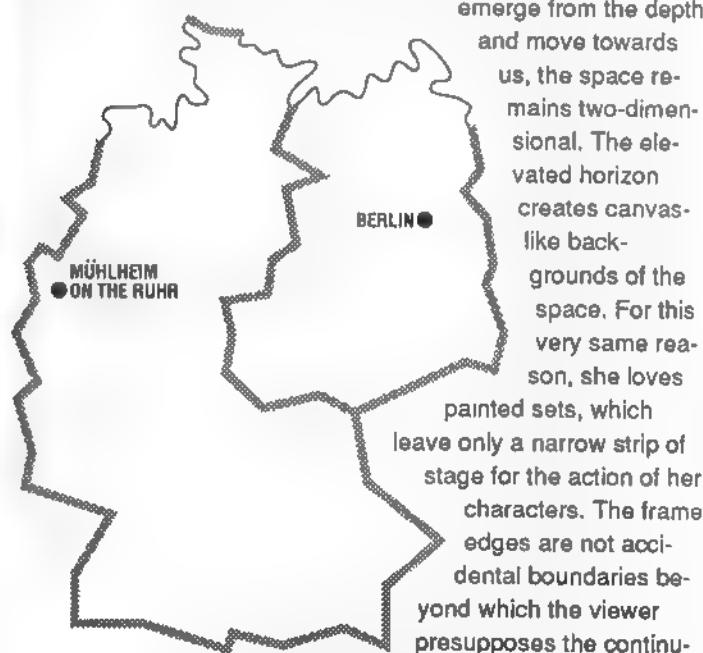
level of education, as is the case with many 'art films': they can be experienced directly through the senses, one doesn't have to put forth an effort to understand secondary meanings.

The very provocative titles themselves defy a direct message and contrast extremely with the titles of commercial films. The former appeal to the viewer's power of association, whereas the purpose of the commercial film title is to awaken the viewer's voyeuristic and sadistic appetites which then cannot possibly be stilled by the film's content. Thus from the very outset, Dore O.'s work refuses the characteristic of consumer goods, that is, to be appealing. The titles, like the films themselves, are not consummated by simply taking note of them. The sound, alongside the title and picture acts, not coincidentally, as a carrier of the incommensurable. It is to be experienced sensually rather than intellectually. The film music of Dore O. and Anthony Moore distinguishes itself from commercial film music in that through apparent monotony, it opens the eyes, by working independently of the pictures rather than accentuating them. After their close, Dore O.'s films continue to resound and create their own intuitive points of reference in

the inner life of the viewer. That requires not only the viewer's inclination but also his/her willingness to experience images and sounds, capacities which the media complex works so intensively to abolish. One must give oneself over to each of her films. Only with the participation of the viewer him/herself, will s/he achieve the sensual spontaneity which the film aims at exercising. The work expected is the processing of contemplation and visualization into concepts.

THE FILMS OF DORE O by EVA M.J. SCHMID (Nov. 1986)

Dore O. captures a reality in her films which she experiences as image and which unfolds itself in tableaus before her eyes. She dislikes camera movement. She films like she breathes. Her locations mirror movements. Figures are sometimes ordered into rigid compositions, at times arranged. When Dore shows the passages of her film characters, they often become phantoms, remembered illusions. Even when the passages lead into the apparent depth of the frame, or when they



emerge from the depth and move towards us, the space remains two-dimensional. The elevated horizon creates canvas-like backgrounds of the space. For this very same reason, she loves painted sets, which leave only a narrow strip of stage for the action of her characters. The frame edges are not accidental boundaries beyond which the viewer presupposes the continuation of the film plane and space; rather, the world depicted ends at these boundaries. The recipient is given time to observe these film paintings, to make discoveries. Over and over one asks, 'What is that? What am I actually seeing?' The counterplay of planes and figures seems to become an infinitely variable theme. At the same time, the visual experiences speak to the other senses as well. Above all, one feels material contrasts: hardness and softness; the air, the wind; smoothness and roughness; one seems to sense all of these.... What she offers in her films is the plastic arts transformed into filmic messages.

O V E R T H E W A L L

ALASKA

by DORE O.

16mm, 18 min. color, optical sound, 1968

Music: DORE O.

Sound: Violin, blowdrier, several sounds from the Concord Sonata by CHARLES IVES

"AN EMIGRATION FILM: A DREAM OF MYSELF, THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE ACT WITH SOCIETY."

(Dore O.)

"For Dore O., beauty is a part of reality. For her there exists a beauty in fear in the same way that for Genet there exists a beauty in murder. *Alaska* is a filmed dream, but devoid of the simplistic metaphors taken from psychoanalysis, metaphors which rationalize dreams and thus mistakenly facilitate their interpretation. *Alaska* is a film which cannot be interpreted, it can only be experienced."

(Klaus Badeker, *Filmkritik* 5/1969)

"Taking in this film is more difficult. On the other hand, as the taking in of this film is limited to the very pleasure of recognizing structures, techniques, or principles of form, the experience becomes a multi-sided, differentiated, incredible process. What happens in this film cannot be put into words. While both conventional and formalistic films can be equally pinned down by the film critic (exposition of either the storyline or the structure), about an imagistic film such as *Alaska* one can only say that it is located in the antechamber of language, even of consciousness. Dore O. communicates something substantial, something concrete: images, forms, movements, whose interplay presages something yet to be comprehended,

something yet to come. Still more is communicated: a utopian impetus, the sense of expectation. The beauty of this film thus cannot be consumed, it can only be experienced in expectations of the pre-conscious."

(Dietrich Kuhlbrot, *Filmkritik* 12/1969)

LAWALE

by DORE O.

16 mm, 30 min., color, optical sound, 1969

Camera: JOCHEN GOTTLIEB

Sound: DORE O.

"MEMORY IS A CRUEL HOPE WITHOUT AWAKENING." (Dore O.)

"*Alaska* was for me the most beautiful German film of recent times. It communicated to me a sense of tranquility and thus transcended the feeling of apprehension crouching behind its images. *Lawale*, the new film by Dore O., 30 minutes long, substitutes rigidity for tranquility, numbness for relaxedness, sadness for joy. Grey-green dismal landscapes in long uncut sequences, unmoving,

statue-like arrangements of people, ritualized coffee drinking and luncheon, a deserted staircase: dream-images and visions of terror from bourgeois life determine the atmosphere of *Lawale*.

The editing in *Alaska* had a floating, gliding quality about it. The rhythm of *Lawale* appeared to me, although I could not prove it, to be less regular, and to have more sharp edges. The soundtrack, scratchy, grating, noisy, as in *Alaska*, had a certain hectic, disintegrated quality about it this time.

There are moments in the film when the sense of paralysis is unexpectedly lifted. There are short inserts of a few seconds' duration, in which Dore O. can be seen, executing a dance-step or kneeling in front of a wall. They are narcissistic, self-loving images whose aim is a certain inner liberation. Whether the spectator will be able to take up and continue this movement will depend on his mood and openness to experiences. I almost became addicted to these pictures." (Wilhelm Roth, *Filmkritik* 11/1969)

"Pictures then of her family, accompanied by excruciating noise. The mother standing in front of the door, looking out of the window: the family enjoying its Sunday lunch in a somberly paneled room, at afternoon coffee, or breakfast together in bed.

Dore O., always at the edge of things, dreamy, absent, or suddenly intercut with a crouching figure on a bed, turning to and from with her hair flowing. Pictures recur as leitmotifs, like the hand emerging from a pit... Superimpositions - silhouettes of Dore O. alone or with an indistinctly recognizable partner over a barren landscape, behind an overcast winter sky - dominate the film. The austere images tell more about the completely individual process of emancipation of a young woman than whole novels do. The fact that a woman was able to film this process with such self-confidence of form is evidence of an emancipation that is no less relevant for our society than more general socio-critical agitation.

(Peter Steinhart, *Rheinische Post*, 7.10.1969)



LAWALE

**BLONDE
DABANDON**

"In *Lawale*, as was the case in *Alaska*, Dore O. makes herself the subject of the film itself. While in *Alaska* the infinite possibilities of the subject are glimpsed, probed, felt and imagined, in *Lawale* the subject bears in mind the obstructions which limit the possible. *Lawale* no longer contains the immediate naive substances themselves, but rather their images in the consciousness. This objectification clips the infinite possibilities of comprehension which *Alaska* offered. In its place, comprehension becomes more precise. The viewer is trapped in the system of long takes and struck poses (broken up only by short short inserts in which the subject temporarily breaks out) and thus the elan of *Alaska* can no longer communicate itself. The images of *Lawale* have the opportunity to develop their effect more intensively. What was once the everyday has been turned to stone, petrified; the conscious grasping of what was once

immediate and direct bars forever the return. Dore O. bids farewell to remembrance and the remembered. The resulting feelings unfold themselves in the film and thereby, to my mind, release her from them. The accompanying sound, motor-like and monotonous, which alone prevents any onset of pleasant viewer indulgence, points out that recollection terminates/completes itself; as object it clears the path. Put in another way: Dore O. makes neither literary nor formalistic-structural films. She expresses impartially that which is primordial and immediate. This guides her choice of filmic means. For this reason her films are not done with after viewing. The beauty of the works expands during the viewing: in the experience (or in the memory of the experience) of the plethora of possibilities in a space which has not yet been civilized by language." (Dietrich Kuhlbrodt, *Filmkritik*, 12/69)

KALDALON

by DORE O.

16mm, 45 min. color, optical sound, 1970/71

Music: ANTHONY MOORE

Actors: LUDY

ARMBRUSTER, CHRISTIAN D'ORVILLE, WOLFGANG and ROSEMARIE LIESEN, PETER KONITZ.

"A NON-EUCLIDEAN, AMBIGUOUSLY MANGLED AND TRANSPOSED ADVENTURE FILM." (Dore O.)

Kaldalon is a film full of hope, of caution and the desire to act: one can see and hear more than the exterior of things, go up to and through them without destroying them, let them speak, try to understand their language. The adventure that the film undertakes is rich and exciting. There is no return. Whereas *Nekes* in *Abandono* for example, the film for and with Dore O., speaks from a secure position and shows what he has recognized, probed, and found, Dore O. shows the tentative, the vulnerable and simply unfathomable, not-to-be-formulated vivacity: no-thing (found), instead, an activity: a tracing, a recognizing, a search for that which is in and behind things. The senses do not yield to the signs of meaning once they have finally heard the call. *Kaldalon* is a human, utopian film." (Dietrich Kuhlbrodt, *Filmkritik*, 9/71)

BLONDE BARBARISM

by DORE O.

16mm, 25 min., b/w, sepia-toned, optical sound, 1972

Actors: DORIS KURTEN, URSULA WINZENTSEN, FRANZ WINZENTSEN, GEESKE HOF-HELMERS, WERNER NEKES.

Sound: DORE O.

"A FILM FOR THE LIBERATION OF SENSUALITY - A FILM AGAINST THE HOSPITALISM OF SOCIETY." (Dore O.)

Dore O.'s latest film, *Blonde Barbarism*, was shot in black and white and later sepia-tinted throughout. It uses much music reminiscent of a Gregorian choral, a figure (a woman) moves in front of windows, looking down on houses, on roofs, into a courtyard with trees. The atmosphere is that of rain; of sadness, a closed-in life which she does not leave, always the windows, the variation of moving back and forth before them, to the right and stopping and on, or stopping and to the left, halting, moving, slowing down, a strange rhythm which sometimes seems to accompany, sometimes seems to run against that of the music but which still leaves one with the impression as if it had been specifically 'composed' for that particular soundtrack. (Andreas Weiland, 1973)

KALDALON

by DORE O.

16mm, 21 min., color, optical sound, 1974

Music: ANTHONY MOORE

Actor: WERNER NEKES

"A BALANCE OF BEING IN ENCLOSED SPACES. The sliding of facades and rooms, like scenery, through various axes, in various levels of multiple exposure together with entrances and exits of a person. Landscape exists only as a view through windows and doors. Individual shots stand in opposition to each other, modify themselves, or dissolve altogether into other pictures. Side by side with erupting pictures, images that collide and pile up, there are the fragments of spaces/

O V E R T H E W A L L

rooms and time sequences, attraction, fusion and repulsion of the various halves of the film image, with the purpose of creating a sensual topology. These are the main formal elements of the chosen film language. One picture devours the next." (Dore O.)

"Important and beautiful - *Kaskara* by Dore O. Her film halves the format. The thorough use of this technique leads on the one hand to a grammaticalization, on the other, to a liberation of the image from explicit content (narrativity). The landscape is seen from within a house. Window bars and door frames slide along in front of meadows and fir trees. The view through the window, the realization of an invitation from the outside. The surroundings are bent, fractured, doubled, taken in and contemplated."

(Dieter Kulhbrodt, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 11.1.1975)

"After the beautiful film *Blonde Barbarism*, Dore O. has returned to the theme of enclosed space and openness. The film is less a synthetic than an antithetical work. *Kaskara* poses the window as the way out, as a promise of space and peace. It opens onto a countryside with its small labours of blissful everydayness, shot from within and in colour. This juxtaposed to a city window which is closed or broken, without perspective; the reflections in shop windows or buses only point to more windows, windows in high-rises, sliding windows, shot from the outside in black and white. Anthony Moore has done the sound again, a very simple canon which fits in very well with the long takes, in which the frame is divided in two. Each half, in a play of reflections and multiple

exposures, seems to be an echo of the other." (Dominique Noguez, *L'Art Vivant*, 2/75, Paris)

FROZEN FLASHES by DORE O.

16mm, 30 min. color, silent, 1976

Actors: INGRID KAMOWSKI, CHRISTOPH HELLER

"LIGHTNING STRIKES THE OBLONG OF DREAMS OUT OF THE DARKNESS." (Dore O.)

"*Frozen Flashes* is not immediately accessible, and its difficulty is not just an apparent one which can be resolved with the light-bulb effect. However, the more one gives oneself over to the film, the more accessible it becomes - but only insofar as one becomes ever more mesmerized by it. Nothing changes with regard to its basic inscrutability. *Frozen Flashes* is a 30-minute silent film. But it not only refuses sound (to which a filmgoer is so accustomed), but also movement, or at least the movement of figures. It consists of a chain of still photos, which are each visible for only a few moments. Their delicate colors - blue, blue-green, ivory, pastel pink - remind one of Picasso's blue period or of dream images; their soft contours, of hand drawings. The pictures, however, are not blurred in soft light, but flicker and pulsate feverishly, almost aggressively. Short moments of subdued lighting alternate with flashes of glistening white, which often go through several stages, so the image itself appears to jolt and oscillate. This sensation is reinforced by an actual jolting effect which is accomplished by slightly moving the camera angle with respect to

light and dark elements so that, with every lighting change, the objects before the camera appear to jerk up and down.

But this is not executed regularly, nor is the alternation between dark and bright images regular. The changes do not obey any comprehensible, mechanical principle. Some segments are bright throughout, others dark throughout, still others alternate between bright and dark passages in different succession and lengths. The occasional scattering of frames of black leader increase the impression of unpredictable autonomous action. But the images always remain long enough or pulsate long enough for the viewer to scrutinize them, even though the flickering light and frequent withdrawal into black keeps one's perception unstable. It is as if the images were following ever new impulses and thus emitting ever new impulses, demanding to be re-examined and re-viewed more intensely. They refuse, however, to be stably absorbed. As if they were fixed in the state of exaggerated alertness, the frozen flashes of the film are carriers of a fleeting intensity. The obstinate pulsating of the images and their rhythmical alternation between brightness and darkness reflect and create - a state of consciousness which embraces ambiguity, which contains and endures contradictions. The film leaves the question open whether it describes such a state of consciousness (e.g. as the state of a young woman who experiences herself in her relationship with men and is working through her experiences) or whether it attempts to awaken this state in the viewer. Both possibilities can be experienced.

...With the flickering of the

images, their sudden disappearance and reappearance, impulses are emitted which set the imagination in motion - without dictating narrow content. With the filmmaker's refusal to establish a context, and with her presentation of scenes as frozen moments, the effort of the viewer to organize and construct meaning along the chain of images collapses. One feels beckoned to approach every moment, every image anew, to weigh them differently each time according to the various associations and suppositions which lie in the images. In the place of a narrative linearity, which determines fiction film, steps an endless branching out and interweaving of imaginative situations and feelings.

In some ways *Frozen Flashes* is comparable to therapeutic projection tests. In a similar manner, it induces emotional reactions without alluding to a specific representation or situation and thus sets the experiences and feelings of the viewer in motion. But unlike such projection tests, which are marked by an empty neutrality and conscious artistic poverty, *Frozen Flashes* is a subtle work of art of startling originality and beauty." (Noll Brinkmann, *Medienpraktisch*, 2/1980)

NEKES by DORE O. and WERNER NEKES

16mm, 33 min., color, optical sound, 1982

Camera: REINER KOMERS
Music: ANTHONY MOORE

"Beuys (1981) and *Nekes* (1982) are documentations by Dore O. NEKES NEXT TO A MIRRORED SURFACE. Speaks to himself and explains his film theory. Static

camera. One should listen, undistracted. Minimal use of filmic language, but however, the most intensive power of expression in the composition of the frame. At the same time the spartan form transports a

SCHULLER

"THE REALITY OF THE FILM IS THE FANTASY OF THE VIEWER. MY NORTH POLE IN THE RUHR VALLEY, DEDICATED TO GEORGES MELIES." (Dore O.)



characterization of the film subjects presented, of the individuals presenting themselves."

(Eva M.J. Schmid, 1986)

STAR OF MELIES by DORE O.

16mm, 12 min., color, optical sound, 1982

Music: HELGE SCHNEIDER
Actors: VOLKER BERTZKY,
THOMAS MAUCH, MARION

"Like others, Dore O. goes back in time, into the history of film. All the way to Melies. She has left radicalism, the destruction of conventions to Kristl. In her new film *Star of Melies* she has put superimposition, which Melies discovered in 1898, to her own purposes. The star, the wife, shines over a double re-make: one of the old *Trip To The Moon* and one of Dore O.'s first film, *Alaska*. The many

dissolves do not demonstrate film technique, but rather intensify a moment of time in film history, that of the last century. Dore O.'s optical theatre is not a new construction - it is rather renovation and restoration more beautiful and splendid than it has ever been before. If one looks closely, the impression that the film consists of dissolves vanishes. Its lyrical and poetic mood is more likely derived from Dore O.'s paring away, layer by layer, with the care of a picture restorer, in order to find and discover."

(Dietrich Kuhlbrodt, 1986)

"The figures of the film have no text, no dialogue. We hear a male voice chanting a text. Modern opera. One only understands sentence fragments and must attempt to combine them with picture fragments in an effort towards interpretation. But this is not an easy task since the text seems to run away from the picture - as is the case in all good film, whereby tautology is avoided.... The statement behind the message will be differently understood by each viewer according to his/her prejudices. Ambivalence is a characteristic feature. The theme of *Star of Melies* reminds one of *Kaldalon*. This is one of Dore O.'s loveliest films. An expedition to the pole. Paper stage sets with graphic polygonal apertures. Splintered. The world has gaps and fissures. The world? Our memory of it, of old books, of old films."

(Eva J. Schmid, 1986)

ENZYKLOP

by DORE O.

16mm, 37 min., color, optical sound, 1984

Music: ANTHONY MOORE
and HELGE SCHNEIDER

Actors: GEESKE HOF-HELMERS, MARION SCHULLER, HORST GURSKI

"A LAMP IS ON THE TABLE AND THE HOUSE IS IN A BOOK - I SHALL FINALLY LIVE IN THAT HOUSE." (Edmond Jabes)

"Suppose it were possible to pierce with one look the 166 volumes of the *Encyclopedie methodique par ordre des matières*, that compendium of universal knowledge which to this day informs our view of the world, instead of going through it page by page. There would emerge in a split second a view of the world in which, instead of narrative linearity and analytic dissection of the different aspects of matters, simultaneity, superimposition, and penetration of the different levels and forms of consciousness could capture the multilayered flux of the state and presence of matter. The encyclopaedic view of the world, which methodically brought order into matter, could be transformed into the cyclopic view, which burst into the world like lightning and, by grasping with one eye everything simultaneously, joins the separate into the one, discovers the one in the other. The encyclop is a re-discovery and a reconstruction of the cyclopic view, which Ulysses expunged in order to free himself. The search for this lost eyesight leads into intermediate worlds, into the area of association and of profusion of dimensions. An anthology, a cascade of images/imaginings arise, from above and below, from within and without, feeling and thinking, dream and reality, hearing and seeing, present and past, reflection and reality, coming

O V E R T H E W A L L



ENZYKLON

into and passing out of being, symbol and reality, myth and history, art and reality, appearance and reflection, stage and reality, simulation and dissimulation."

(Karin Stempel, 1985)

BLINDMAN'S BALL

by DORE O.

16mm, 35 min. color, optical sound, 1989

Music: ANTHONY MOORE, DORE O.

Actors: GEESKE HOF-HELMERS, RUDIGER KUHLBRODT

Camera: DORE O., SERGE ROMAN

"THE SITUATION OF LYING AND FEVERING CREATES A FANTASY AND DREAM WORLD - REALITY SHATTERS IN THOUSANDS OF MIRRORS, WHICH SHOW THE LIFE, WORK AND MEMORY OF THE SICK IN FACETS." (Dore O.)

"*Blindman's Ball* is a lyrical film. It neither describes events nor incidents, but condition, situation and memory, dream. From the story of the

people in the film (two men, two women - who can also be seen as identical - in different conditions of life and time) we get to know only pieces, details of memory, from which we - depending upon our own feelings - get a vague story. A man is sick. He is afraid to become blind. His wife nurses him. She is tender, but she also possesses the helpless man. He has nightmares, in which memories of trite moments of the past are included. Happy moments? Moments, which are repeated. Is he afraid of losing them? He is afraid of the real images, of those of the surroundings and of those on the walls of his rooms. The mirror above his bed is black most of the time, reflects flashes or minimal reflections of light. What is happening around the sick man becomes a horror to him. The pyjama, which his wife puts on and takes off him seems to become alive and turns into a puppet-like ghost.... The beginning and the ending of the movie are identical: the woman dresses the person in a new pyjama. This is shown

backwards at the beginning as if she undressed him. At the end, we see the dressing, but the wrong way round, so that the identity is not clearly visible. A playing with film time. A playing with all possibilities of the logic of combining images. A FILM, not a filmed piece of literature..."

(Eva M.J. Schmid, 1989)

"The film title *Blindman's Ball* oscillates between eyeball, male physical organs and dance performances... the story seems to run likewise from front to back and vice versa... On a constant level of high tension, its electrifying state encloses fear, faith, memory and hope. It is a situation of great latency, of indefinite expectation of an appearance. *Blindman's Ball* describes this situation in detail. The house (it is her house in Mulheim) becomes unsteady and begins to roll from one side to the other on the Ruhr, which flows by in full volume. Joris-Karl Huysman's book *In the Roadside* gave the inspiration to this film. Without even using one

sentence, Dore O. describes a picture world equivalent to Huysman, which has become hostile, poisoned, a needy environment of barbarism and destruction which requires a speedy clean-up. A couple, holding hands, ensures their survival until the following day. The optical machines of the light pioneers are rusting in the cellar, a gear wheel cog projects now in exaggerated form, threatening, into the picture, like a meat hook, only without meat. A detestable, wanton picture. Then the eyeballs, still before they are drowned in blood, are lovely to look at in the huge projection. The nurse, who tears linen, enjoys the sound and makes it a musical happening. She strips the pioneer of his nightdress, which becomes alive and starts to dance. The world, free from control, becomes easy, playful and funny again. Tango. Ball." (Dietrich Kuhlbrodt, Frankfurter Rundschau, 31.12.1988)

G

E

R

M

A

N

Y

SUPER 8 / BERLIN:

H. Markgrat, NORMAL



THE ARCHITECTURE OF DIVISION

by KEITH J. SANBORN

Instead of an Introduction: THE SUPER-8 QUESTION

IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS IN AMERICA, MANY OF THE SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURES FROM THE TRACKS OF THE FORMAL FILMS OF THE '60S AND '70S HAVE COME ABOUT IN SUPER-8. AND THAT, BOTH IN SPITE OF AND BECAUSE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NETWORK OF REGIONAL MEDIA CENTRES IN THIS COUNTRY. Super-8 is light, portable, relatively cheap; you can own your own camera, projector, and editing equipment without a bank loan, or a relative leaving you money in a will. You don't have to rely on what you can borrow from your local media centre for a day or two. Super-8 is a format many can and do live with. I had heard there was a great deal of activity in Germany in super-8 and I had seen

O V E R T H E W A L L

a few of the films in Buffalo and New York. I had heard stories about more, and above all about Berlin, the paradoxical centre of German culture. I wanted to



E. Metzner, *ubertall*

find out about the impact of super-8 in Germany and about the sensibility of the current generation there. For Germany, at least in our current mythology, is our nearest cultural double. I narrowed my field of investigation to the western half of the city of Berlin.

In late March of this year, I traveled to Berlin to meet certain people, to show my films and perform, and to find out about super-8 in Berlin, to gather films for this show. Long before I left this country, I had been in contact through friends with one Berlin filmmaker, Yane Fehrenberg. She had shot an extraordinary film alone in Africa in super-8. As a project it recalls Leni Riefenstahl's pursuit of Africa; in its realization it is more direct, intimate, and humane. Unfortunately, Yane's film remains incomplete and she declined to show it publicly in its current state. She did, however, put me in contact with other filmmakers who, in turn, put me in contact with others. Yane's Africa project was the beginning of my search, but I had received the benefit of assistance from Ingrid Scheib-Rothbarth in New York as well, in the form of program notes from two Berlin super-8 festivals and some names and addresses.

Also in New York, I had heard of a super-8 night at the Berlin Film Festival of two years ago, organized by Alf Bold, the Director of the Arsenal Kino. Through Yane and others I knew that the Arsenal was a centre of independent film activity

in Berlin. When I arrived in that city, it seemed only logical I should go there. I found Herr Bold to be an exemplary director. He possesses an acute historical sense and keeps himself well-informed about current work on the edge of the edge of established film activity. He seems to know everyone and be everywhere at once. Herr Bold furnished me with a number of additional names and addresses of super-8 filmmakers in Berlin, and again, they put in contact with still others.

During the course of my four weeks of intensive film screenings in Berlin, I came to realize that super-8 activity there has no centre. It has, rather, a multiplicity of centres which can be connected only by imaginary lines. Wherever and whenever I screened work in Berlin, I would try to ask: Why super-8? I wasn't sure the question even had a meaning in this context. I was left feeling sometimes like Sam Spade, sometimes like Sigmund Freud, sometimes like Margaret Mead, and sometimes just like another filmmaker. When I could get an answer



P. Jacquet-Droz; *Automaton: YOUNG WRITER*

to the super-8 question, it was nearly always the same: super-8 was the only thing they could get their hands on - the only thing they could afford. And though recently there has been some aid to super-8 filmmakers in the form of small grants and play at festivals like Oberhausen, practically no one I spoke with could afford 16mm, nor did they want to get involved.

When they do get their hands on some money, they go out and buy top-of-the-line equipment rather than shooting a few rolls on a rented 16mm camera. They stick to super-8, for one thing, because many of the films are used in multi-media performances in clubs and cafes, so there is no particular fetishizing of 'image quality', while it does remain important that equipment be portable and easy to handle. Super-8 crosses cities and national borders infinitely more easily than 16mm, and there is a reasonably good distribution network in the form of Kinos in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany which show super-8 alone, or alongside 16mm and 35mm. It is seldom difficult to find a super 8 projector in Berlin.

The equipment for production comes from either individual resources or the resources of small groups, usually with a core of about five people. Although more structured super-8 clubs exist, the groups of people I encountered were formed out of pre-existing friendships, common aesthetic and political interests, and sometimes sheer economic necessity. And these groups could usually manage to put together a pretty impressive array of equipment. Though some people owned no projectors, almost everyone had a camera. Quite often, the equipment on hand included the best available brands and models.

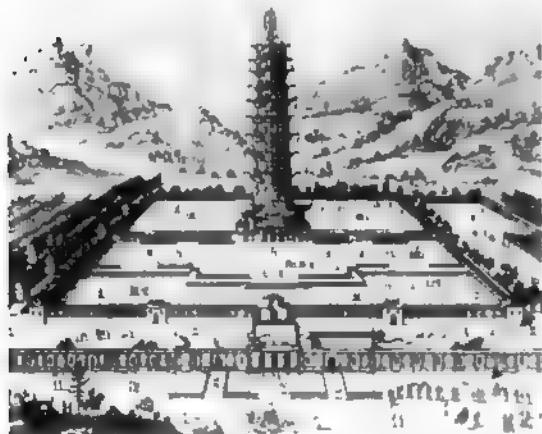
Most of the filmmakers working in super 8 in Berlin are satisfied with the post-production results they can obtain with their own cameras, editors, projectors and cassette recorders. If the need arises, a mixer and sound processing equipment can be produced without too much trouble. For the more formally exacting, concerned with frame-precise control of sound-image relationships through cutting

there is the 'perfo-band' system. In this system, 1/4" tape with centre perforations is synched on a tape recorder with a projector or special editor. Though there are no super-8 film processing labs in Berlin, film can be sent to other cities further west and comes back in a few days. Printing services are offered by several individuals. Most of the prints in this show were made by Manfred

Jelinsky of Berlin and demonstrate enviable quality. I was struck by the refreshing willingness to share equipment among group members. At nearly every stage of the process, equipment was shared among friends and even among individuals with more or less conflicting aims.

At the beginning of my investigation, I suspected that the super-8 question would prove to be moot. In America, after all, there are media centres and if you hustle hard enough you can accomplish most projects in 16mm or video. But the fact is, even here, the support structure doesn't cover everyone and has many disadvantages. In Germany, there are no institutional structures outside of film clubs, university film departments, and the National Film and Television Academies. The vast majority of the films in this show would never have been made had it been necessary to overcome institutional inertia, let alone the pricing structure and general hostility of the industry to truly independent work. But the decisive proof of the importance of the issue comes from the films themselves. The 16mm films I have seen which have come out of Berlin during the past few years when these super-8 films were made were - with few exceptions - nothing short of wretched. Mostly slick, well-mannered pseudo-features made apparently to provide seed money for projects in 35mm.

This is not to say that all of the super-8 work I saw in Berlin was of tremendous



E. Fischer von Erlach, NANKING PAGODA

interest or inherent merit; even allowing for cultural and linguistic mistranslation, most was deadly dull. As bad as the



The TV tower, 'NEW TRADEMARK OF THE CAPITAL'



J. Bentham, PLAN OF THE PANOPTICON

average American video tape, in fact. Whatever the explanation, super-8 has been a vital sector in the cultural life of the city of Berlin. I have made a personal selection from among the many films which form a record of that activity. The curious will discover the criteria of the selection somewhere between the films themselves and the views which follow.

I'M LOOKING OVER THE WALL AND THEY'RE LOOKING AT ME

BERLIN IS A WALLED CITY,
AN INVERTED FORTRESS -
A CITY WALLED-IN. IT LIES
AT THE CROSS ROADS:
SPIRITUALLY AND GEO-

GRAPHICALLY EQUIDISTANT FROM
EAST AND WEST. GEO-POLITICAL
AND INTELLECTUAL CENTRE OF

THE WORLD. The inhabitants of New York or Paris or Tokyo or Moscow, or even Buenos Aires are used to flattering themselves with some set of qualifications which places them at the centre of the maze of world history; a trip to Berlin destroys any such pretensions. In Berlin, with a twist of a TV dial or a trip across town, you move from West to East and back; with the qualification that you must have started in the West to make the physical trip over and back without risking your life.

Along the wall in West Berlin there are observation platforms not unlike the ones at Niagara Falls, which allow a tourist glimpse into the East. What you see is a zone of concrete, barbed wires, steel defenses, towers full of soldiers with binoculars watching you watch them.

Above the Alexanderplatz in East Berlin stands the TV tower which the East Germany guidebook refers to as 'the new trade-mark of the capital'. It can be seen nearly everywhere in both halves of Berlin, like some sinister and banal remnant of an East Block World's Fair. This

huge eyeball of the state converts the entire city into a vast yet reciprocal panopticon prison system. You watch; you are watched. At all times. It is a kind of death watch for civilization, as much a wake for the world destroyed by World War II as a morbid contemplation of the cold, slow agon which could become World War III at the sight of any given final signal.

agon n. pl. agones. 1. (in ancient Greece) a contest in which prizes were awarded in a number of events, as athletics, dramatics, music, and poetry. 2. Literature. conflict, esp. between the protagonist and antagonist (Gk *agon* struggle, contest)

In Berlin, the double city, everything is halved and doubled - multiplied through division. In the contests with prizes and in deadly conflicts, East and West stand locked in a frozen stare, each the mirror image of the other. Each contemplates the spectacle of the other society; each remains oblivious that it is the society of

O V E R T H E W A L L

the spectacle. In the East, ideology is merchandise; in the West, merchandise is ideology. With mirror symmetry, each



K. Hoffmeister, BERLIN/ALAMO

exploits the ideological merchandise of Nazism to describe the other on TV. And there, in that 'other', in the invisible montage of waves which cross in space, the oxymoronic conjoining of Nationalism and Socialism is preserved.

I repeat: Berlin is a city of doubles, divisions, dualities. An infinity of mirrors. Images live a special life and the arts live from the traffic in images. The arts in Germany have risen from the smoldering ruins of German culture left by the War. Following a prodigious archaeology, the 'New German Cinema'; began to appear. Recently in America we have seen the level of circulation increase dramatically, not only in the realm of the feature film of the past 20 years, but in the realm of the formal film which grew alongside it as well.

And what of the present generation? We have begun to catch a glimpse of it in the work of the 'Neo-Expressionist' painters, *die junge Wilde*, several of whom have made super-8 films themselves. In the super-8 films of Berlin, we begin to see the outlines of a new sensibility take shape in film. One that functions apart of the New German Film Industry and largely apart even from the museum and festival structure which emerged to support both the 'new' features and the formalist avant-garde.

The work in super-8 began in the street, in lofts, in studios. It quickly moved not to museums but to cafes, music clubs, and small independent Kinos (movie theatres). The work in this

show is the product - with the possible exceptions of Polish emigree Roza Spak and of Monika Funke Stern - of a generation acculturated through TV and rock music. The only film historical reference points I could extract from any of the filmmakers I spoke with, was the work of Abel Gance and Fernand Léger. With one or two exceptions, the filmmakers in the show claimed to be entirely ignorant of the formal film of the '60s and '70s, either as it developed in Germany, or abroad. For the saints of the 'New German Cinema' I heard only disdain. But Berlin is a city of Kinos, and in a given month you can see anything from Eisenstein to Pasolini and current independent work from Hamburg to Pittsburgh. So it is difficult to sort out with reliability the film influence on this work.

And Berlin is not a city of Kinos alone. There is live music of all kinds, from Gamelan Orchestra to Wagnerian Opera, from David Bowie to Miles Davis. On the radio, you can hear virtually the entire history of music from every sector of every culture in the world. The super-8 film in Berlin developed in and absorbed much from this musical context as well. It would seem that the decisive contextual factor in the formation of this sensibility has been the multiplicity in itself of possible sources of cultural influence.

BERLIN/ALAMO

BERLIN IS A CITY UNDER SIEGE; THE EVIDENCE IS EVERYWHERE. The machine gun pace and the images of machine guns in Knut Hoffmeister's *Berlin/Alamo* ironically reflect this condition. Tanks of American GIs parade up and down, barrels high, while huge black vans disgorge waves of W. Berlin not police into the streets. These uniformed men are the ghosts of Santa Ana's troops storming the celluloid bastions occupied by John Wayne and Berlin demonstrators. It is a nightmare where the decayed ideology of Hollywood find perverse realization on the street.

The situation is complex. For while West Berlin is surrounded and besieged

by East Germany with the 'anti-fascist protection wall', the division into two Germanies is imposed from without. East Berlin remains, for all practical purposes, in the hands of the Russians and West Berlin is visibly occupied by French, American, and British troops. And then come the internal divisions within the city itself, between the representatives of property, law and order on the one hand and the mass of inhabitants on the other.

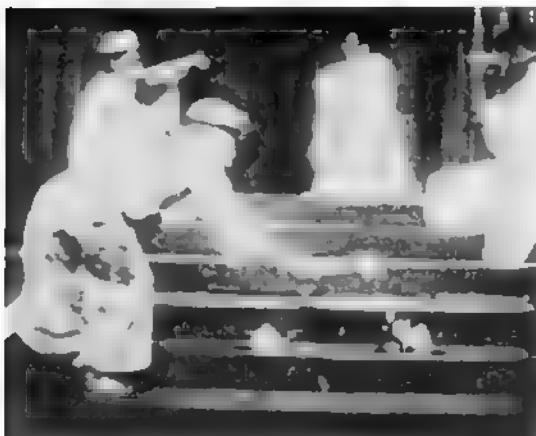
The riot police in Hoffmeister's film, for example, are on their way to 'monitor' a demonstration against harassment of 'squatters' - people who occupy otherwise abandoned buildings and whose legal status remains in a kind of institutionalized twilight zone.

These vectors of force in complex interaction have shaped the sensibility of this generation of artists who choose to live in Berlin. There is a profound pessimism where so many givens are visibly out of one's control. There looms over Berlin a hyperabundance of authority figures, competing for attention both on TV and in the streets. But the spectacle of so many competing authority figures at a certain point becomes so grotesque it reduces itself to absurdity. Daily survival demands of these artists and of all Berliners a psychic flexibility seasoned with a global sense of irony. They are survivors on the edge of an abyss which extends back into the entirety of their pasts and forward into the all but unforeseeable future.

The effects of these conditions on the individuals and the work are varied, so that while certain common patterns are visible from time to time, there is no universal code of expressive response to be analytically packaged for intellectual consumption. At every point of contact the ground shifts and threatens to give way, to reduce exegetical architecture to rubble.

FROM CALIGARI TO SINN-FILM II

HOW THEN SHOULD THIS WORK BE DESCRIBED IN AESTHETIC - POLITICAL TERMS? IN THREE WORDS: IT IS ECLECTIC. This is not to dodge the issue of stylistics by invoking a vague pluralism, but rather to replace it with the issue of cognitive style. For Berliners, all historical styles



Teufelsbergproduktion, SINK-FILM II

are equally available, and eclecticism is sometimes pursued as what seems to be an end in itself. It is not. It is a working methodology for making use of the most plentiful civic cultural resource: history. For Berlin is a city saturated on history. Though young by European standards, Berlin has more than compensated for its youth by the excesses of its past fifty years. The work of Teufelsbergproduktion provides a paradigm of these historically eclectic excesses. They describe themselves this way: 'In existence since 1980, Teufelsbergproduktion has up to now made 11 films, from murder mystery to science fiction from romance to industrial film and there is no end in sight.'

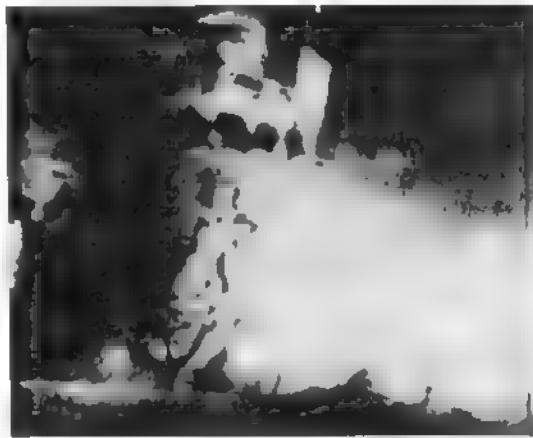
Their *Sinn-film II* presents a model for their overall project; it is a whack-ball encyclopedia of film and TV styles placed in a comically rigorous frame-tale format. The frame-tale format presents a tale, or series of tales, within the narrative architectural framework of another tale, sometimes with many narrators. Familiar examples are Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and *The Arabian Nights*. This format has a long and venerable history in German film, reaching back most significantly to Wiene's 1919 Expressionist masterpiece *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*).

In *Caligari*, the main action is ostensibly framed as a narrative within the deluded conversation of two madmen in an institution. The paranoid delusions of the tale, however, becomes so wild they burst the frame with a superabundance of bizarre behaviour and warped architecture which one is at pains to distin-

guish from the behaviour and architecture of the framing tale. By the end, the audience is in considerable doubt as to which reality - the tale or the frame - deserves privileged credibility. This symptomatic condition is shared by the great, heteroclitic mass of criticism which has attached itself to the film. *Caligari* is the paradigmatic critical fiction for any discussion of German Film. It is all things to all people and so induces a kind of critical aphasia, or to borrow from Jakobson, a contiguity disorder.

In this condition metaphor holds dictatorial sway. Syntax, hierarchy, directionality becomes meaningless, so everything is equally and meaninglessly comparable to everything else. Discourse is reduced to a word heap containing, in the case of criticism, the fragments of favored ideology.

Sinn-film II produces a comparable condition, in fact raising the critical



A. Hillen, REVUE FILM

stakes. *Sinn-film II* is indeed the second part of a larger project, with the same protagonist and the same stylistic excesses. In *Sinn-film II*, as in *Caligari*, there is a mad director and his murderous creation, but there are many symptomatic differences of sensibility: *Sinn-film II* has a heroine (cross-dressing as a male in her fantasy), not a hero. And this transgression of sexual roles in the dominant codes of narrative film is extended to cross-dressing by nearly everyone in the film. The result is a powerful alienation effect whereby sex-roles and stereotypes may be viewed at

a considerable level of abstraction.

The prismatic multiplication of sex-role identifications has a tradition in Berlin which leads back at least to the notorious sexual border-crossings of the '20s and persists in the mythology of androgyny so greatly amplified in the media by David Bowie during his stay in Berlin in the mid-70s. And beyond the mainstream of overt hetero-, homo-, and bi-sexuality, the dialectic of clothing and sexual differences leads yet another double life in that city. On the one hand is the institutionalized spectacle of transvestism which one can access through either the Berlin Tourist Office or the numerous club listings in the city magazines. In the city magazines, not only do transvestite performances and clubs constitute their own special category of spectacle, but visiting celebrities of the genre receive attention in feature articles. During my visit, I saw a feature on Craig Russell of *Outrageous fame*. On the other hand, there's the lifestyle of transsexuals, 'the third sex', as one of the protagonists in Rose Von Prauheim's *Stadt Der Verlorenen Seelen* (*City of the Lost Souls*) refers to him/herself.

To return to the *Caligari* comparison - the comparison, which *Sinn-film II* clearly invokes on its own, it also mercilessly travesties. For the heroine, who has been brought back from the dead, escapes the doctor's control, more like Frankenstein's monster than *Caligari*'s Cesare. And the costume of the doctor in *Sinn-film II* looks most like a theft from the wardrobe of *Nosferatu*. In addition, while the framing device suggests an exact relationship - the woman reading plays the murderer in fantasy - the wild profusion of styles and activities, and the competing *Caligari* send-up (which constitutes a frame tale within the frame), defy any attempts at diagramming its narrative architecture. Both the quality of overabundance and the specific stylistic allusions make clear than *Sinn-film* is the conscious and ironic product of a generation acculturated through TV. For it is there, every second of every waking hour, that appears the most accessible and characteristically conspicuous abundance of the commodities and ideology

O V E R T H E W A L L

which compete for the attention of every Berliner.

Finally - finally - *Sinn-film*, besides showing a paradigmatic profusion of styles, shows as well a symptomatic fluctuation in quality, lurching from brilliance of conception and execution to incredible dullness and ineptitude. This inconsistency can put a made-for-TV strain on viewers, sometimes bringing about a totally unintended alienation effect. But this is the work of a generation - as the original Expressionists called themselves - of 'apocalyptic adolescents'. It should hardly be surprising that it occasionally produces adolescent apocalypses.

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

A MORE UNDERSTATED MANIFESTATION OF THE TENDENCY TO STYLISTIC ECLECTICISM can be

view. The Frankenstein myth and the shot/reverse shot system in narrative are brought into dialogue with current racial mythology and the immediate, yet otherly, astylistic quality of home movies. In a series of strategic substitutions, the extreme reactions of the burghers in the Frankenstein film are intercut with handheld footage taken by the filmmaker of Turkish children looking out a window, playing games, blowing soap bubbles. To the accompaniment of sinister music, the burghers are shown to view the Turkish children as monsters threatening the integrity of social architecture. Here lies exposed the institutionalized racism felt and practised in Germany against Turkish guestworkers and their families. *Berlin/Alamo* makes reference to this condition as well, showing Turkish children at play at the construction profession of many of their parents. They rehearse the construction of yet another small wall in the public sandbox.

features which are distributed on super-8 can be confronted with anything the filmmaker chooses from the immediate surroundings. Official Industry Mythology can be made to self-deconstruct on contact with directly observed realities.

The dialogue of personal and official realities in this format is symptomatic of a major component of the sensibility of the current generation of artists not only in Berlin, but here as well. Now that moving images have become truly accessible on a mass scale, the 'aura' described by Benjamin is finally being brought under close critical scrutiny. 'Finally' because, contrary to Benjamin's intuition, the mere injection of the technology of mechanical reproduction into the culture proved insufficient to destroy the aura while the control of the means of photographic and cinematic reproduction remained in the hands of capital. Instead, the media industries managed to transfer the aura from the individually fetishized objects of

the past (paintings, sculpture) to mythically favoured individuals - the stars who inhabit the media paradise of high fashion and eternal vacation. It is the shift to mass accessibility of the media which has proved decisive. This shift has brought about a change in sensibility which distinguishes current work in film, especially in Berlin, from apparently similar work in the Underground film of the '60s.

That shift in accessibility has two major components. The first component is a qualitative leap in media intelligence occasioned by the drastic increase in time devoted from a very early age to viewing motion pictures on television. The second component is the shift of the means of production of sound motion pictures out of the exclusive control of the media industries and into the hands of the great masses of individuals in the form of

sound super-8.

Though 16mm was available as early as the 1920s, sound production, espe-

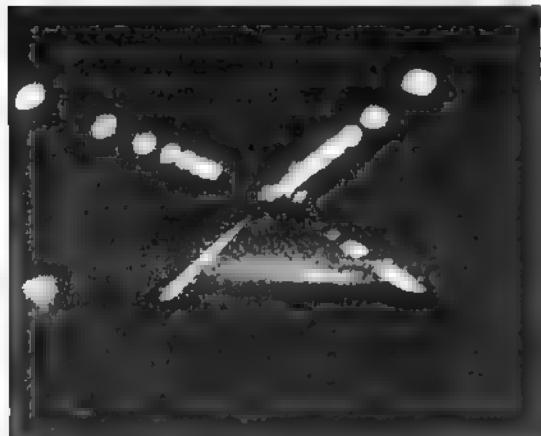


A. Hillen, REVUE FILM

found in Andrea Hillen's *Revue Film* (*Spectacle Film*). *Revue Film* sets up a series of complex interactions of point of

Hillen's film is prime super-8 material; it turns the consumer medium on itself. Shortened versions of Hollywood

cially sync sound production (our media standard for authenticity) has remained a financial hardship of impossibility for all



C. Doering, 3302

but a few. The cost of super-8 remains relatively low. Distribution is as simple as setting up your projector and getting people into a room.

The relatively low cost of super-8 technology is at this point infinitely more reliable and cheaper than low-cost video, especially as concerns editing and display to groups of more than three people. And again, super-8 crosses borders more easily than video, which is especially important in Europe. Not only does it have the innocuous appearance of consumerism pleasing to border officials, there is only one super-8 format. The number of incompatible video standards and formats boggles the mind. In the current state of affairs, it is disheartening to consider that super-8 seems doomed to rapid extinction in the face of the massive shift apparent in this country toward electronic media. The

consumer market, of which super-8 is a part, constantly reorients itself in favor of the function of consumption. The video disc, for example, is a one-way street towards the elimination of media participation by the great masses of population. The lack of universal acceptance of the disc format and the proliferation of disc formats is some cause for hope. It remains to be seen whether market incentives will remain for the production of consumer video tape technology and at what level of quality, especially as concerns editing.

A ferocious legal battle is now taking place which could, if the Media Industry gets its way, undermine the accessibility of small format video by increasing its costs through taxes to be returned to the industry as compensation for loss of revenue through home piracy of broadcast programming. These taxes will have the immediate effect of decreasing sales and, in turn, further increasing costs by reducing production scale. This double effect will take the video recorder out of the hands of an undetermined number of people, effectively disenfranchising them from participation in the production of moving images. It is precisely the function of recording

in the hands of the mass-consumer which Hollywood perceives as a threat. And the psychic charge of that threat goes beyond simple consumer piracy; it is the privileged and stable position of control of public consciousness which is at stake.

I have digressed on this point at some length to place in perspective the cultural importance of super-8. For while it clearly stands at the cutting edge of current media activity, its importance can only be gauged by reference to its place in the larger picture of the clash of personal and official realities.

This critical dialogue of personal and official realities made possible by super-8 is the motive force of Yana Yo's *Gehindiekneunddrehdichnichtum* (*Bend down and don't turn around*), subtitled 'a black and white film to dance alone with'. In this case, a repeating loop

of a scene from East German TV showing small Chinese children exercising en masse is set to two rock songs by German bands. First we hear DAF (Deutsche Amerikanische Freundschaft = German American Friendship) tell us to move our asses, to dance the Mussolini, to do the Adolf Hitler, to do the Jesus Christ. Then we hear a short fragment of a more instrumental-dominated song by Saal 2 as frame-by-frame handpainting produces a flicker of contrasting colors. Image, music and color merge in a stroboscopic, epileptic dance of political and perceptive opposites, as the matter goes somewhat nihilistically out of control, or reaches a higher dialectical synthesis, depending on your personal level of flicker tolerance.

The instruction of the title 'don't turn around' can be taken as ironic reference to a poster which appeared a few years ago on the observation towers in the East overlooking the 'anti-fascist protection wall'. The poster facing west instructed: 'Turn around. Your enemy is behind you'. It showed a huge uniformed and geometrically stylized Nazi about to overpower a small citizen soldier from behind. It advised that the spirit of Nazism was lurking in West German leaders; they wanted men in uniform only to renew old plans for conquest. But the possible truth of the reference to the enemy behind is schizophrenically split by the visible presence of the enemy in front. For Berliners, turnabout is not only fair play it is a major component of the strategy for daily psychic and physical survival.

SPACE AND CONFINEMENT WE ARE THE PASSENGERS

A NUMBER OF THE FILMS IN THIS SHOW CAN BE READ AS VARIANTS OF THE GENRE OF THE CITY SYMPHONY, INAUGURATED BY AND FOR THIS CITY WITH WALTER RUTTMANN'S *BERLIN, DIE SYMPHONIE DER GROSSTADT* (*BERLIN, SYMPHONY OF A CITY*) OF 1927. It is the model Modernist film treatment of the city; the urban milieu is seen in musical analogy as a formal concert of machine and machine-like human rhythms. Though it is doubtful there is any direct influence of Ruttman

O V E R T H E W A L L

on this group of filmmakers, the comparison is instructive by way of making obvious the differences between the Modernist and Post-modernist treatment of the city.

The sheer exhilaration in the machine rhythms of the modern rail network which brings us into centre city in Ruttman's film has been replaced by a more distanced observation of an endless expanse of highway. A critical consciousness now moves over the paths of the pavement and the video screen.

Noisia: Vision, Narcolepsi, 3302, Berlin/Alamo and *Incendo Italiano* share a common discourse of genre based on

through the expanses of the Autobahn and the video screen, but through outer space and into the inner expanses of desire, moving us forward by symbolic transitions and transpositions.

Doering's vision of Berlin stands in stark contrast to these. He gives his nights in taxi number 3302 a powerful dose of film noir, populating them with a superb gallery of Berliner types. From the edge of the street they jump out at us and into his back seat. And while Doering leaps momentarily into ecstatic and grotesque hallucination, he always returns to ground the charge in the concrete. In 3302, reality assumes the quality of a tangible and relentless nightmare.

Hoffmeister's *Berlin/Alamo* examines violence and social struggle in the street. His style cuts closer to Doering than to Hormel or Buhler, but his world view is possessed of a unique intensity generated by a level of overt political commitment unrivalled by other filmmakers of the genre.

Kiesel, in *Incendo Italiano* (roughly, *Italian Conflagration*) takes the metaphor of highway traversal as the central axis for an exploration of poetic sensibility in the grand tradition of

Goethe's Italian journeys and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. The woman we see 'speaking' German at the beginning, 'speaks' Italian at the end. This news-caster indexes the passage from one sensibility to its opposite, but only a rough directionality obtains during the course of the film. Our road trip floats freely between north (a jerky loop of the Berlin wall) and south (vacation footage). Daily activities are seen, under the motif of a flickering, warped grip, to hold a mysterious energy which film can release. A shoe is tied, later we see the same footage, projected in reverse to reveal a strange beauty in the gesture. This is a more purely poetic enjoyment of a trope we see in Vertov's *Kino glaz*, where a living steer is reassembled from a rent carcass. But Vertov moves didactically in one direction against the current of the dominant representation of reality. Kiesel gives preference - though not an exclusive one - to a kind of meditative mirror play, relying on a

system of references internal to the film and to German culture.

The track of *Incendo* was created by Frieder Butzmann, a well-known Berlin musician. It flows in dense parallel movement with the stream of images, reinforcing the elegantly oblique references of the imagery to the economic and political state of things.

The formal mirror play of *Noisia: Vision* and *Incendo Italiano* recalls the narrative bracketing of the framing tale in *Sinn-film II*. In a situation where all images and historical styles are felt to be equally available at any given moment, the filmmakers take recourse to mirror repetition to delineate the problematic of cognitive boundaries. The favored exploration of an infinite highway is more than the employment of a formal armature to string together otherwise unconnected incidents in these films. It is a strategic and symptomatic response to the conditions of constriction and compression imposed on the inhabitants of a walled city, the inner walls of which lose themselves in internal divisions. These filmmakers take significant detours from the track of Ruttman's purely formal observation of movement, giving critical insights into the urban environment, revealing the inner mechanisms of memory and desire. These detours distance the current work from the machine age Modernism and superficial treatment of urban space which allowed Ruttman to participate in the making of *Triumph of the Will* and ultimately to meet his end shooting newsreels on the Eastern Front.



F. W. Murnau, DER LETZTE MANN

this motif. Each, however, takes us for a different drive along it.

Hormel chooses a roughly symmetrical overall structure for his film which is reproduced in the typographic play of the title. By slight deformation, 'Vision' is mirrored in the made-up 'Noisia'. The approximation to a palindrome in language finds a correlative in the bracketing of the bulk of material in the film with the image of an eye burnt-through. At the beginning, the eye is burnt through to the whiteness of the screen which is then filled with the images of an inner vision. This inner vision is realized in film, but seems intentioned to transcend it. At the end, we see the same burnt-through eye reverting to its normal functional integrity.

Buhler's *Narcolepsi* references the pathological condition characterized by frequent unpredictable lapses into short periods of deep sleep, linking the condition of her imagery by metaphor to the dream state. She takes us not only

FA-FA-FA-FA FASHION

BERLIN SUFFERS FROM WHAT MIGHT BE CALLED TERMINAL CLOTHING SICKNESS. DRESS, MAKE-UP, FASHION ARE PART OF THE DAILY LIVES OF PEOPLE IN EVERY CITY, BUT IN NO OTHER CITY I HAVE SEEN DOES CLOTHING HOLD SUCH ABSOLUTE POWER. Clothing in every city constitutes a part of social identity, but in Berlin all clothing attains to the status of a uniform. And Berlin is a city absurdly abundant in uniforms.

In this context, there exists a perverse yet discernible relation between

Murnau's *Last Laugh*, (*Der letzte Mann*) and Markgraf's *Norma L.* Lotte Eisner says of Murnau's film, 'This is pre-eminently a German tragedy, and can only be understood in a country where uniform is king, not to say God. A non-German will have difficulty in comprehending all its tragic implications.' I can only confirm the enduring importance accorded to clothing; for example, I watched a woman - a dead ringer for the woman in *Norma L.* - in the Cafe Swing in Berlin on a busy night spend 45 minutes putting on her make-up in the middle of the room, using the front window for a mirror. If the ending to *Norma L.* seems somewhat banal and forced, i.e. unmotivated, the film in its entirety remains important both as a symptom of current behaviour and a conscious response to the conditions of the environment. For the filmmaker's sympathies lie with the woman; for him, the careful attentions to make-up and dress constitute a kind of Post Modern heroism of everyday life. The stylishly ominous, sensual atmosphere anticipates her end; she is preparing an exquisitely made-up corpse.

Similar attention to the quality of everyday life is to be found in *Der Tanz Mechanikk* by R.S. Walkenstein. But instead of stylish tragedy, we encounter, at least initially, virtuoso comic treatment of the world of techno-constructivist fashion and better living through consumer electronics. The conclusion to this film, however, is affected by a similar and pathological confusion of the tragedy of the banal with the banalization of tragedy. The flat, relentless precision of the drum-machine track provides witty counterpoint for the initial expository episodes. But it simply cannot rise to the level of a mechanism of fate when the final images fail to convince us with their harmless attempts at the grotesque. We cannot identify with the reactions of the woman to those photographs. There remains only an impression of unnecessary constraint.

Both *Norma L.* and *Tanz Mechanikk* display a symptomatic feeling of the lack of an authentic or enduring ground for everyday life. The fall from structural integrity and psychological authenticity experienced at the end of both films is like a collapsed version of the inconsistency of the Teufelsberg film. I experi-

enced a similar mixture of vague disappointment and uneasiness before the massiveness and geometric ultra-regularity of Berlin architecture, as if I were condemned to temporary confinement to some monumental and labyrinthine shopping mall.

THE PRIMITIVE/THE MYTHIC/ THE CHILD

DANCE AND PAINTING FILMS ARE ALMOST ALWAYS THE WORST POSSIBLE FAILURES, WITH MUSIC FILMS COMING IN A CLOSE THIRD. Somehow, with the exceptions that constitute genius, such as Maya Deren, the ontological integrity of either film or the other medium is rudely compromised by some fallacious comparison, or assumed metaphoric identity between the two. While I would stop short of declaring *Was fur Geister?* (What kind of ghosts?) a work of genius, the film is certainly extraordinary in the ease with which filmmaker/painter/musician Antje Fels brings us into an experience of ritual in painting, in filmmaking, in music. The rhetoric of the work is an eclectic expressionism, which draws freely on a

in public performance, both alone and in collaboration with musicians making music, and filmmakers showing and shooting film. Occasionally the roles are even interchanged; a marked contrast to the neo-professionalism and disciplinary territoriality here. Fels created the track for this film in collaboration with Nickolaus Untermollen, playing along with the projected film.

In a way, this sounds sort of hippy-dippy, neo-60s, but Berliners make it work. They break down the division of spectator and spectacular product by incorporating the process of production into the experience of art. This breakdown, however, as it assumes the form of a ritual, exacts its price in separating itself from everyday life. But the need is great, for this need to ritualize production in art is a product of the pessimism which comes with a consciousness of limits - the limits imposed by foreign occupation and internal division - a tangible, visible, overwhelming presence of history in daily life. This is disabused if desperate tribalism.

And the practice of ritualization is not confined to the domain of art. Even a riot in Berlin possesses an aspect of stylized play. One throws rocks, then goes to the park for a picnic; one returns to overturn cars, then heads for a cafe. But this play contains the threat of real violence, for to maintain their charge, the brackets of ritual draw energy from danger, from the uncertain in the midst of the known.

An even further disabused encounter with tribalism is to be found in *Das Leben des Sid Vicious* (*The Life of Sid Vicious*) by Die Todliche Doris (*The Deadly Doris*). Doris is a mythological, Duchampian porno-queen for the post-war generation, whose female members were so commonly branded in Germany with the name. Doris is also a group of artists consisting of Wolfgang Muller, Nickolaus Untermollen and usually one other person. Their activities include the promulgation of her official mythology, the publication of books, and live performances. Performances may include on a typical evening stories around a real campfire built on stage, rigorously controlled and highly disso-



Moreau, the younger. From Rousseau's *EMILE*

variety of 20th century sources. The effect is a sort of tribal meeting of ancestral spirits, Picasso and Pollock, Murnau and Brakhage - African, American and European art.

In Berlin, painting is practised both privately and publicly as a performance/ritual. Not only do many painters paint with music at home, as they do here, but recent years have seen painters painting

nant music on electric and amplified instruments (only loosely comparable with NYC Noise Music), and last, but not least, films. *Das Leben des Sid Vicious* is among four or so films they have produced.

Das Leben des Sid Vicious is, simply, one of the most compelling and creepy films I have ever seen. It exactingly expropriates 'the child' from the numinous trinity hallowed from the Enlightenment through High Modernism of the

evil banality of everyday life lived in the shadow of the media - our most perfect image of the society of the spectacle in which we 'live'.

FROM THE BODY TO THE BODY POLITIC

AWARE THAT DIVISIONS ARE PARTLY A MATTER OF CONVENIENCE, PARTLY OF NECESSITY



Die Tödliche Doris, DAS LEBEN DES SID VICIOUS

primitive/the mythic/the child. It accomplishes this by treading a path on the boundary between home movies, pornography and feature film.

It brings to a definitive end the credibility of the Brakhagean project of recovering childhood innocence through heroic individual male formal bravado on the sacred mountain above the lowlands of popular culture, home of the feature film. At the same time, it gives the lie to the genial exploiters of popular culture like McLuhan. And - why not at this point in the hyperbole - its treatment of violence exposes the outrageous and

FOR DEPICTING AN IMAGINARY DIVIDED CITY, WE MOVE TO ASSEMBLE AND DISSECT A FINAL EXQUISITE CORPUS OF WORK: THE BODY. We begin at the beginning: the paradigmatic, binary setting *Computer Bild* (*Computer Image*) by Brand-Maschmann. Brand-Maschmann might be described as a highly energetic two-bodied system; one of a number of such systems to be found in Berlin. This system, however, has been found to exhibit a large number of capacities, including that of transmitting large amounts of energy across vast dis-

tances. This unique capacity has played a key role in the organization of many exhibitions of super-8 from Berlin, both there and abroad. The application of this capacity at several critical moments aided greatly in making possible this exhibition as well.

Computer Bild highlights another of the productive capacities of the Brand-Maschmann system: multiplication through division. To the accompaniment of edenic electronic birdsong and

pingpong, we witness first, a division into complementary colors, then division into color and image. Next, as the pair in the image divides, as each member, in turn, leaves the frame, we witness the division of space within the frame and the division of the space of the frame from the space outside it. Finally, as the image of the pair is projected by one half of the pair (Axel) onto the other (Anette), we are made conscious of the division of the projected from the real and, by implication, of what we see on the screen from ourselves. Through this repeated application of different strategies of division, the most basic film viewing situation has been multiplied to produce a potentially infinite field of possibilities.

Speed by Funke Stern presents a less edenic account of the effects of bodily division. This film

forms part of a project of feminist work in film. Though elsewhere the feminist project is referenced more explicitly, it remains important for understanding the resonances of this more personal work above the level of purely formal concerns. In *Speed* the filmmaker moves through a dialectical play of active and passive viewing. First, an active outward pursuit of seeing the world from a moving car, then a reflexive, pixillated, handheld hop-skip-jump dance of the filmmaker's own feet as she traverses several terrains Maya Deren style. Next, she assumes the position in front of the



A. Brand and A. Maschmann, COMPUTER BILD

camera, moving from a passive role in the presence of the camera stare to a more active, playful, irreverent engagement. Then comes an archetypal passive female media role model in the form of a richly adorned Marlene Dietrich in a highly compressed fragment of some romantic entanglement. Because of the mechanical differences between film and video, the image on TV which we normally take for granted is distorted in the process of its appropriation by the filmmaker. This distortion and the time lapse compression (used as well in the previous section of the film) creates a distance between ourselves and the material. It becomes 'other'. We see below its surface effects as it is brought into the dialectic of seeing and being seen. We intuit the effect of the original material on how women are seen by others and how they come to see themselves as 'other'. In short, the mechanism of the division of women from themselves and their transformation into the property of others. Finally we return with the filmmaker to watching herself, this time as she rides a bicycle. Having passed back and forth across the cultural dividing line of the frame, of the division between seeing and being seen, we have been made conscious of its divisive effect upon the body and the self.

A more grueling interrogation of bodily identification and division is to be found in Roza Spak's *Handlich*. The title introduces us to a situation of ambiguity, where what is manageable may slip into what may be touched with the hands. From the language of the title, we move to its bodily seat, the mouth. The mouth

is touched with the hands. The hands move to touch fish on a table. The hands move to bring a knife to the table. The fish on the table are brought to the knife. We are connected by successive, contiguous movements to the fish on the table to be cut, creating a gruesome, tactile identification between what is cut and the one who cuts. As viewers, we are drawn into active, attentive participation in an act, the repulsiveness of which we usually strive to ignore. The vertigo of the ambiguous relation between ourselves and

what we see is further intensified by the contrast of the lush symphonic track with the spectacle of disembowelment. Watching, I am reminded of the violence lurking just below the surface of civilization. Listening, I am reminded that in the death camps they played Wagner. By the end I have identified myself with this particular situation in a way which becomes symbolic and general, and yet remains bound to this particular film as an experience anchored in its concrete details and retained as a personal memory. The gauze which heals neither the fish nor the filmmaker is an ironic reminder of the rent in the body of our experience made by the film. The question remains open whether we have been healed by this intense experience of bodily division.

Walter Gramming's *Hammer und Sichel* (*Hammer and Sickle*) assaults the categorical divisions of the modern state with a grotesquely comic attack on the symbolic distinction between the body

and the body politic. The fetish quality of the symbol of the East German State - surrounding W. Berlin and engaged in holding up the struggle of the working class in the paranoid Stalinist tradition - is exposed. All that is sacred to the Bureaucracy and the Army of the German Democratic Republic is held up to ridicule. Gramming takes a wild romp, garbling patriotic songs, parodying stereotypical poses, attacking the integrity of the filmstrip, and even menacing the chastity of these material representations of the symbol. The film's final image reminds us, however, that this iconoclastic play is propelled by the consciousness of the capacity for real violence latent in that symbol and in those who use it as a privileged means of representation. It is the image of a hierarchy of outrageous violence; to bring it down requires a commensurate violence of outrage.

A REPORT OF TWO SIGHTSEEING INCIDENTS IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

SOME BERLINERS WHO BECAME FRIENDS IN THE COURSE OF MY VISIT TOLD ME THE STORY OF SOME ITALIAN FRIENDS WHO HAD COME TO VISIT THEM A FEW MONTHS EARLIER. AFTER A FEW DAYS OF ACQUAINTING THEMSELVES WITH THE CITY, THE GUESTS INQUIRED WHERE THEY COULD BUY A PLASTIC MODEL OF THE BERLIN WALL, SUCH AS ONE MIGHT FIND OF THE COLOSSEUM IN ROME.

In West Berlin, a few blocks from the Stock Exchange, near a theatre playing Brecht's *Rise and Fall of Arturo Ui*, I noticed a monument. It consisted of two 3 X 6 foot slabs of grey granite placed about 100 feet apart. Each had a text in German. One read 'To the Victims of National Socialism' and below was a pair of dates to delimit the period ending in 1945. The other read simply: 'To the Victims of Socialism'. No limiting dates. Somewhere in East Berlin, there must exist at least one other pair of granite slabs.



W. Gramming, HAMMER UND SICHEL

O V E R T H E W A L L

'I Was Tired of the Super-8 Ghetto'

BLAU/BLEU/BLUE



AN INTERVIEW WITH STEFF ULRICH

STEFF ULRICH is a multi-disciplinary artist living and working in Berlin. His performances, still photography and artist's books led him eventually to the cinema. While most of his work has been in super-8 he has recently begun to reconsider the economy of super-8 production/distribution/exhibition and has begun making work in 16mm. His films combine a resolutely personal expression with a frank and open imaging of sexuality. He is married with two children and badly in need of money to make his next film.

MH:

What do they call your work here - experimental, avant-garde, underground?

SU: There's no real word for the work my friends and I are making because a name always comes after, not before something. So you can call it 'experimental' but it's a special kind of experimental.

MH:

What makes it different?

SU:

Films were experimental in 1968 but no longer. We use the experience of structuralism and we know about the formal avant-garde but we use as well a dramatic structure in our films - there's a balance.

MH:

Are there other common themes?

SU:

One theme everyone has in common is sexuality.

MH:

Last night I watched the *Kali Film* by Birgit and Wilhelm Hein - an "experimental" German film about sexuality - are the films you're describing like that?

SU:

No, the Heins belong to the older generation ('68) and they're really good at selling themselves, everyone knows them. But I can't see that they've found

anything new for themselves over the last ten years. It's not bad work but they ignored all their structural filmmaking, and tried to make something else. So they couldn't be really sincere in making their structural films or their drama films either. They're just trying to keep in fashion.

MH:

How did you come to filmmaking?

SU:

Structuralism influenced me much but because I lived in a small village I could only read about it. Then I went to Cologne and met Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. I stayed there for three years and saw a lot of these films. Some are not worth seeing, some are just good ideas, lectures, bringing some philosophy to a point. Structuralism has no place for emotions, so it can't survive, it's just a very intellectual thing.

MH:

Did you start making films in Cologne?

SU:

No, I started after reading about structuralism, I also tried to make these films but it wasn't really satisfying.

MH:

Did that change after you were able to see a lot of that work in Cologne?

SU:

Mostly, I studied art and made performances. One was called *Altar*. I documented my way of living, making photos and collecting objects from my room. I contacted Daniel Spoerri and Joseph Beuys and tried to make contact with Kristl and asked them to take part in this *Altar* performance. I didn't tell them what to do - they just looked at the photos and Beuys wrote something on them - things like that. In the end I destroyed it by publishing it all, piece by piece. I put all of the objects and photo negatives in a self-published magazine, in each a different set of pictures, so in the end I had nothing left.

MH:

In your film work was there a shift from structural interests to more personal work?

SU:

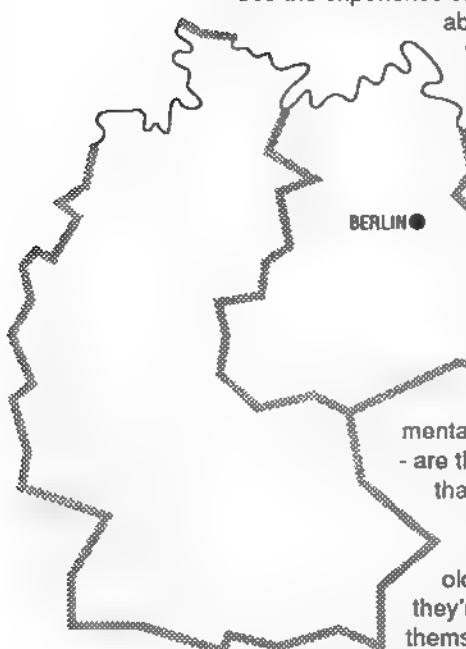
Yes, I made two short films called *Self Portrait* which are both personal and structural. The first was made in 1980 showing a polaroid coming out of the camera and developing and after a while you could see me filming the camera. (laughs) To show me as a filmmaker. (laughs) The second showed me posing - re-dressing, naked, and posing, all cut quickly in-camera. Then for awhile I gave up filmmaking because nobody is really a filmmaker or painter or writer, most people do everything, and for me there were times when I was writing a lot or making photographs or making performances. But when I came to Berlin, in 1982, I made a different kind of art, something between land art and performance. I made photos of victims, I lay on the ground in bars, on the street, on the pavement and had someone chalk a line around me, and cars had to stop when I laid on the street. I went to the Orange Bar - it's a homo bar, quite famous - and I laid on the ground and people thought, 'What's with him, he's drunk', and someone was with me and made the chalk outline but then someone came and laid on me and kissed me (laughs). It was my kind of experience with cities because I was in many cities at that time, I was in Cologne, Berlin and everywhere in Germany I made this performance.

MH:

Would you leave the photos where you took them?

SU:

I just took them, I wasn't very interested in being famous. In this period I made no films at all. Then I wrote a treatment for a film and received money in 1986. It's called *VerFilmt* in Germany and *Shot* in America. This is my first long film, 45 minutes. All other films are from 1-4 minutes and they're all super-8. This one is 16mm. I've also made a video that's quite long, 3 hours. It's a good example of this structuralism coming together with drama because



anything new for themselves over the last ten years. It's not bad work but they ignored all their structural filmmaking, and tried to make something else. So they couldn't be really sincere in making their structural films or their drama films either. They're just trying to keep in fashion.

MH:

How did you come to filmmaking?

SU:

Structuralism influenced me much but because I lived in a small village I could only read about it. Then I went to Cologne and met Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. I stayed there for three years and saw a lot of these films. Some are not worth seeing, some are just good ideas, lectures, bringing some philosophy to a point. Structuralism has no place for emotions, so it can't survive, it's just a very intellectual thing.

MH:

Did you start making films in Cologne?

SU:

No, I started after reading about structuralism, I also tried to make these films but it wasn't really satisfying.

O V E R T H E W A L L

it's called *Video for Living* and all you can see on the screen is an aquarium, but in the background you can hear a drama going on, a very slow spare drama, in normal time. I showed it to Birgit Hein and she said, 'Oh, it's really shit' and after that I didn't dare show it to anybody. It's never shown anywhere.

MH:

Can you talk about the *Shot* film - was that the first film you scripted?

SU:

I've finished ten scripts but made just one because I didn't have the money. Dramatic films in 16mm cost but I was tired of the super-8 ghetto. Super-8 films are made for other filmmakers, you can't get a real audience.

MH:

Others have reported a big boom in super-8 around 1980 - how was it different then?

SU:

Well, it was a little big boom. At the moment only one theatre in Berlin shows super-8 films and then perhaps once or twice a month, Kino Eiszeit. Arsenal shows super-8 maybe once a year. In 1980 a lot of people came to make super-8 and they didn't know anything about film so they made films like the 1968 16mm films. Only a few tried to find their own way of making film. But the others were all doing what was done before, and after awhile this became obvious to them, to everybody, and they gave up filmmaking. They sell their camera to someone who does just the same, reinvents film without knowing what's gone on before. Only a few try to make something new in light of the history. I think that's important. If you go to a super-8 festival you see a lot of bullshit. And if you go twice you see three times as much bullshit. It's a malady, an illness of super-8. Many people think it's really cheap so we can have cheap ideas. Most of the few who have ideas are also making 16mm films. Like Michael Brynstrup for instance, or Derek Jarman. This 16mm film I made I used bits of super-8 - it just depended on what I needed.

MH

What is *Shot* about?

SU:

It's about me. It has a lot to do with masturbation and thinking about film and thinking about me, not in a solipsistic way but in a philosophical way. It's a very autistic and narcissistic film, I'm actor, cameraman, editor - and this kind of filmmaking is typical for the film because it's going in circles around me. It's a comedy really but nobody in Germany understands this - mostly foreigners see it this way.

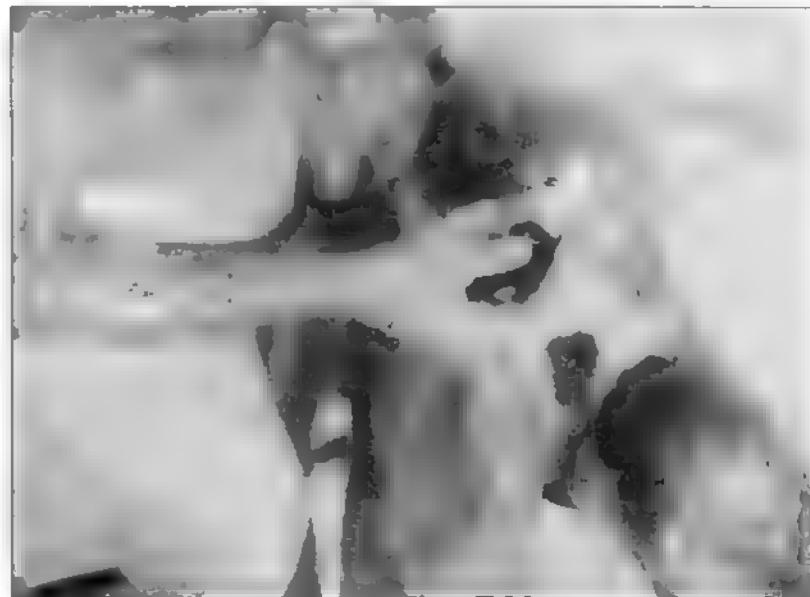
MH

What does it look like - how does it progress?

SU:

It's made on two lines. One is made in black and white - it's a story set in a blood bank which turns into a cafe. There's a woman, a nurse, who takes this

man's blood and he falls in love with her and you hear tango music. A waiter comes and brings wine but he can't open it. It's hard to talk about, I don't want to make a mathematical film but I think about mathematics when I make a film - about how things add up. There's one part in *Shot* just 3.5 minutes long and there's 300 cuts. First I had an idea of what I could make - because this sequence was more like music, you could see foreground events while in the



Steff Ulbrich in
SHOT

back there was a screen which showed the foreground moving in an endless loop. This loop was cut in a special rhythm, so I cut the scene to that rhythm. I had all these work prints and I cut them into pieces and laid them on the floor for days like a puzzle. What I didn't know is that I couldn't afford to make

Kerstin Quitsch in
BLAU/BLEU/BLUE



the negative cut so I had to make a copy of the rush prints, with dirt, but it was okay, you should always let reality into the film on many levels, on a material level for instance.

MH:

You have a family - Is there pressure to make another kind of work to make money?

SU:

For *Shot* I got money to make it but not to live on, you get money only if you sell to TV. For *Shot* it's difficult because it's about sexuality and not naked tits, it really touches you, it's really offensive, not with pretty girls but with me. The film is about me and the way my children have changed my relation to sexuality and there is no money in this. If you live alone you live in a very artificial climate and you don't have to care about some things but in fact in the end you have to care about children. If you don't have any children in 10-20 years you won't have anyone left to see your films (laughs). It's true. But many artists don't like children. They think they can't work. I think it gives your work something - especially when you talk about sexuality, which most filmmakers I know do; they talk about it in an abstract way, with symbols and analogies, but some are trying to talk about it more directly like I am. Structural film is something you do when you're alone and you're bored, you play solitaire, it's just a game to keep you occupied. Before I was just busy being busy. Now with the family I'm really trying to say something, I have no message like propaganda, but I'm more conscious... *Shot* was very different from what I made before.

MH:

Could you talk about the short films?

SU:

They show one idea, very compressed things. I made no films for some time, then I made this 16mm film and when I was working on

Shot I made about 5 hours of super-8 material, and I made some short films out of that. They reflect singular ideas in *Shot* that go in another direction. I



Max Goldt and
Edith Maagh in
SHOT

had one scene with the children standing in front of the mirror, looking at themselves and knocking on the mirror, and running around, and leaving the picture and laughing at the camera, and the boy running to the camera and holding his hand up to it. I made this in super-8 and I took another film - *Roger Rabbit* - so I had this contrast between a home movie and a movie you watch in the home. The super-8 film I made with the sound of the 35mm but in *Shot* it was a dream sequence because my refilming from the screen changed all the colors. It was the same material but two films came out of that, like the difference between writing something by hand and using a typewriter. The super-8 was handwritten. I'd like to make more films out of this material but it's so tiny this super-8, this little world, even to see what's on the picture.

MH:

But it's nice that you use super-8 in an almost traditional home movie way, reworking that tradition. Is there a difference in the way you film yourself which you've done for some time and the way you film your children? I'm wondering about how your children regard the camera?

SU:

I don't know... there's a difference. When I film them it's mostly with super-8 and I'm very aware of how someone else would shoot them as a home movie and I try to play off this in my work, my shooting.

MH:

Can you say something about the images of your life, this parallel life almost, this image world you're building of yourself and your children, the relationship between this world and how you're living?

SU:

Everybody's work documents his/her life, this is what I'm making explicit. This development I spoke of before is parallel to film development. *Shot* is a very narcissistic, autistic film. The film I'm making now is really away from me. I'm working with Harry Baer, an early actor with Fassbinder. I think it's a state of mind I'm coming to, so I had to change my way of making films. It's always changing. In *Shot* I took ideas from the films of film history and re-made them. In the new film I took a part of a George Bataille novel, *The Blue of the Sky*. I wanted to make a long adaptation of this book but you have to buy film rights so I decided to make a film out of this fragment. And a friend of mine gave me some money to hire an actor. This film has a lot to do with the theatre, with how people stage themselves. The protagonist is lying in bed, it's filmed in a hospital. In the book he's visited by a woman and he wants her to sing something. She does and after he says, 'It would be nice if you'd sing it naked'. Then she sings it naked and it's over. What I'm changing is that the woman's visit isn't real, it's just his imagination. It's an inside drama. All dramas are inside and outside but the problem is they think it's all

O V E R T H E W A L L

outside with action so they don't use the language of film, they only illustrate the theatre.

MH:

About a week ago my traveller's cheques were stolen and I had to go to the police and tell them the story. It seemed to me then that the law, the word, has to do with those moments where your life becomes a story. There's an enormous flux of events always, but at a certain point something happens, and everything around that event becomes attached to it, ordered, and given significance.

SU:

I think the law is a very high expression of our culture which is basically dramatic, it represents us, and we live in the reality of our representations.

Now things are changing. It's no longer possible to tell stories because of technology. In a book the information falls in sequence, but on a computer or a newspaper everything happens at once.

MH:

What happens after the story - how can you communicate if you can't tell a story?

SU:

A film should build an emotional room in the place of a story - but now there's still a mix. In a horror film the feeling is the main message, not the story, though it shows both. The computer changes what it means to be personal. I don't know which is first, the change in culture or technology.

MH:

Does this have something to do with changing the form or structure of a film? New technologies also change the shape of our present, so formal change anticipates the way accelerating technologies become less our extensions and more the way we work. This seems to me a good reason to be concerned about formal issues, which seem always to live in a self-contained world oblivious to their surround, and yet which continue to provide an image of changing systems and how it might be possible to live in those systems.

SU:

Yes, in a film for instance you can show time voyages, in the image world they're technically possible, because we're increasingly adept at manipulating time, or the image of time. Then reality may follow. For art the material is very important and if your material is time this is something new. When I was young my father took many photos of me, and I have many pictures in situations I can't remember. Sometimes I think I remember myself as 3 or 5 but then it turns out to be just a photo. I've no original remembrance of it. The photograph takes the place of memory.

MH:

This is the argument Plato uses in the *Phaedrus*. He warns against the new technology of writing, claiming it would take the place of our memory.

SU:

But you never have an original remembrance of anything, you can't have your past back, memory is always partial.

MH:

But I wonder if it isn't possible to have a perfect memory of something, to remember everything about just one moment, every look and smell and taste. That memory would be no different from being there, it would be like traveling in time. I think film is a little



Harry Baer in
BLAU/BLEU/BLUE

like that, an image of a perfect memory. Schmelz dahin's films are like this, they're very emotional, hinting at stories without ever telling them. They want to convey the feeling they have while working through the material. The films seem to be the trace of their passage, of their coming together as a group.

SU:

Yes, they work on physical material, like the vanishing shots in *Shot*. I had a project with a film with a story and I wanted Schmelz dahin to develop it but I couldn't get any money so I couldn't make it.

MH:

Is it hard getting money?

SU:

If you need 15 or 20 marks you can afford it. But from the State it's difficult, especially in Berlin. There's money for film but not for our experimental work, only dramatic films or these very boring advertising films. I got the money for *Shot* from North Rhine Westphalia; I couldn't get it in Berlin.

MH:

So do the independent filmmakers pay for their films themselves?

SU:

Yes. At the moment we're trying to create an arts council. Many people are making our kind of film in Berlin but they're always hindered in their work because they have no money. Now it's getting to the point where the city council controlled by the Green party says 'Okay, we'll give you money'. In Hamburg and North Rhine Westphalia the Bureau is self-organized, they elect their own changing juries of filmmakers. But in Berlin they have a jury for ten years now with four bankers and one, Erica Gregor, is very conservative, and these people make the decision every time. The government doesn't want to change, but we have to change this because without changing the jury you don't change anything. The government in Berlin changed half a year ago and I wanted to make this film with Schmelz dahin and I thought why can't I get any money from Berlin? I called Michael Brynstrup and Michael Krause and said we should do something. So we invited every party and the man in the government who's in charge

film like *Shot* it starts from inside so you can't dismiss it so easily. People don't want to know about sexuality. Once you start rethinking sexuality you change everything, not just the sexuality but the economic system. People wouldn't be so easily manipulated, for example. You have to find new viewpoints and new ways of showing it. It all works together, the filmmaker develops, the audience develops, even film develops as a medium.

MH:

I think it's hard because we never come to the theatre for the first time, we already know what film is and that stops it from changing. I think it's the reason more people won't see the work you do, it's not enough like Hollywood, the future isn't enough like the past.

SU:

Spengler says we can't understand classical art at all, we think we understand but we just project our own ideas. For instance they had bronze statues in nature and they were very shiny, golden in the sunlight. But when we see them they're covered in a green patina and we put them in a museum room so they're really different. It's not what it was before so we're condemned to our own time.

FILMOGRAPHY/HISTORY *

1960 First time photographed

1975 E - Mc (2) First super-8 with friends

1978-1985 Much super-8 work including: *Selbstporträt I*, *Selbstporträt II*, *Altar*, *Winter*, *Naabbebon*, *Mullerstrasse* not in order of being made I don't know myself, these are films I've never sent to festivals or show them except to friends all 1 - 5 minutes.

1985 *Video For Living Room*, a video more than 2 hours long. It's had one showing for one person.

1986 *Trailer for Anna - The Chinese Method* 4 min super-8

1987 *verfilmt/Shot* 45 min. 16 mm

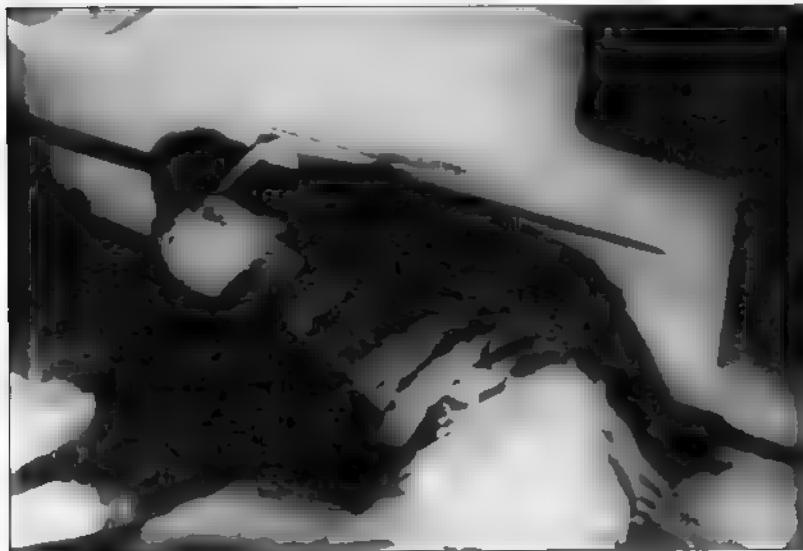
1987 *besonders trocken* 5 min. super-8

1988 *Alles Fisch* super-8 endless

1988 *Shot - Trailer* 4 min. video

1989 *Blau/Bleu/Blue* 20 min. 16mm

*Ulrich notes, "I'm really exhausted and sure that I've forgotten some things like my version of expanded cinema in 1987 when I declared the whole world being a film."



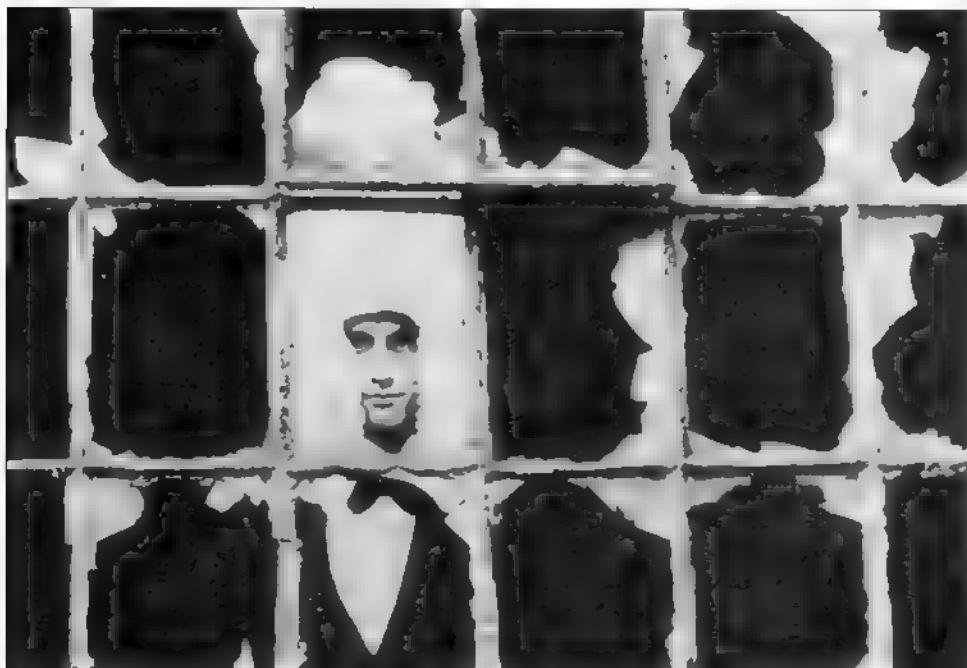
Steff Ulrich in
SHOT

of film to a round table at the Biennale and the government changed to a more liberal party. But now it looks worse than it was before, they call themselves progressive parties, but in cultural matters they're really conservative. They want only social documentary work, and they have problems with sexual films. It's because the women's movement is a part of the party, and parts of the women's movement think that the best kind of sexuality we can have is no sexuality.

Most of the avant-garde filmmakers now are talking about sexuality. It's very important, and I think it will be for the next ten years, or longer. It has been important since the beginning of film. A regular porno film is framed by the porno theatre and the meaning is only money, the way the images appear. But in a

O V E R T H E W A I L

DEATH, OBSESSION + CINEMA



ORPHEUS

an interview with MICHAEL BRYNNTRUP

MICHAEL BRYNNTRUP is a thirty year old avatar of super-8 who moved to Berlin ten years ago to avoid military service. He is self taught, and has completed over twenty films to date, all in super-8, including a feature length version of the Christ story. Casting himself in the lead he collaborated with filmmakers/groups across the country (including clandestine work in East Germany), asking them to choose a sequence from the biblical narrative and shoot it in their own style. Hand processing all of the footage he assembled it to complete *Jesus - The Film*, finished in 1986. The same year he began work on the first of a series of *Death Dances*, an episodic serial using a skull as a common motif. A prolific, imaginative and obsessive filmmaker, Brynntrup has produced innumerable installations and 'film actions', participated in festivals across Europe and organized screenings. Most of his work is self financed.

PART ONE:**Brynntrup and Hoolboom**

(NOTE: Owing to a faulty tape recorder on this interview, much of the conversation with Michael Brynntrup was wiped out. Rather than scrap the interview entirely, it's reproduced here in partial and fragmented form, and supplemented by an additional interview conducted by Steff Ulrich.)

MH:

People say that Michael Brynntrup is obsessed with two things: the first is death, and the other is cinema. They claim you're racing against death, working obsessively all the time, finishing one film after another.

MH:

I work on two/three films at the same time because I pay for most of the work myself. No agency is waiting for me to finish, so I work on my own schedule. The *Death Dances* began very spontaneously. I had this skull which was a relic from the *Jesus Film*, around which I made *Testamento Memori* (*My Last*

exhortation at the end is satirized.

('Please publish after my death.') In this film his talent to create his own new images comes to full expression. His face, his hands, the skull, and a 'Chinese' bird cage dangle in the room like silver shadows on a golden background... The study of death even in his childhood has a deeper meaning. His identical twin brother died in childbirth. Speaking in terms of depth-psychology, the guilt of the survivor unconsciously determines his fascination with questions of death.'

MB:

Yes, in another *Death Dance* I had this skull and I hid it under a cloth. This was a kind of experimental film so I started to film and said to my little niece, 'Go look under the cloth' and she discovered the skull. She was four years old, and the experiment was: what will a four year old child do with a skull?

First, she recognized what it was. She ran right away to her mother, so I had to stop shooting. But five minutes later she started to play with the skull and her dolls, and she went outside in the garden

by a window where the skull is waiting. Fascinated, she picks it up and kisses it. A second picture roll was made with hand development, abstract solarizations. *Die Botschaft* brings these two rolls together. All of the *Death Dances* have two elements in common: each centres on a performer, and each uses music, there's no synch sound.

MH:

You often have others make the score?

MB:

Yes. In Berlin the scene is quite close, everyone knows everyone.

MH:

In music, film, or theatre—

MB:

Yes, more and more. Musicians like to do music for a film, and I make images for their stage shows. Sometimes they use my work as a video clip.

MH:

Is that partly how you get your work shown in Berlin?

MB:

Not so much any more, it was very big around 1983. Then there were still some squats and they always hosted cultural events with a cafe or bar in the house. Or we had a show in a disco or everywhere. Now there's lots of galleries and small budget shops who often show work. They like to organize super-8 weeks, everyone sharing an evening with other friends. The films are shown quite often.

MH:

I thought these films used to exist in a street environment, but that the scene's moved towards festivals and kommunale kinos in places like Kino Eiszeit and the Arsenal, that today the life of an experimental film resides inside a film world, with other filmmakers. Steff Ulrich said he didn't want to make super-8 work any more because it's in a ghetto, that the only people who see it are other super-8 filmmakers. Is that so?

MB:

But super-8 is cheap and you can do it on your own, at home, and work spontaneously with friends, and collect material without having to use it. To produce super-8 films is much easier than 16mm. If you make a 16mm experimental film you have the same problem showing it, but you don't have the possibility of

~~FIVE MINUTES LATER SHE STARTED TO PLAY WITH THE SKULL AND HER
DOLLS, AND SHE WENT OUTSIDE IN THE GARDEN AND FILLED IT WITH
WATER AND DRANK FROM IT.~~

Testamento Memori). Should I describe some images?

MH:

It shows you in hand processed negative—

MB:

And I'm fucking a skull—

MH:

And reciting a text.

MB:

It's not really German. It's a very old text and I made strange pronunciations so it's not so understandable, but it's about breathing when giving birth.

MH:

Birgit Hein wrote, 'In some of his films the skull is his partner and his second ego, with whom he talks, plays, kisses, and even has sexual intercourse.'

Testamento Memori ironically describes the birth-death theme. Texts with music about breathing techniques accompany his playing with the skull, in which the

and filled it with water and drank from it. It's an episode and I like to work in this form. In films like the *Death Dances* I often edit in camera. They're very situational, atmospheric films, very condensed and compact. I make my other work on the editing table, not before. They're more like thoughts in motion, more rational.

MH:

How many *Dances* are there altogether?

MB:

Eight. They're all very different. They show everything you can imagine doing with a skull. The skull is common to each, it's the motif, the signature. One is very bloody and medieval, another shows a magician conjuring it from thin air and making it float. In *Die Botschaft* (*The Message*), the eighth death dance, a woman walks through a very old monastery, throwing handfuls of feathers into the air. Eventually she comes to sit

O V E R T H E W A I L

screening it spontaneously in a bar as was done last week.

MH:
Because the bars only take super-8?

MH:
It's easier for the bars. Today we don't have the mission of a few years before, we don't march into cafes and unwrap our surprises.

MH:
You would show up and demand that the bar play your films?

MB:
It used to happen a lot but not so much any more. This way we reached another audience.

MH:
You don't do this any more because you don't have to?

MB:
It's a personal development. The people who did it in 1983 aren't interested in doing the same thing. Many haven't continued and are doing other things. With these kind of films there's always a ghetto, a very closed circle.

MH:
Does that trouble you?

MH:
Not really, because I do the films I want to do, I don't care. I hate this term 'experimental' film.

MH:
Why's that?

MB:
Because I saw this 'experimental' film in Toronto, at the Experimental Film Congress, and what they showed was not what I mean.

MH:
How would you characterize what they showed?

MH:
The experimental film they showed is only an episode in film history which began in the early sixties and still goes on, but it's now anachronistic. In the sixties it was worth doing, it was new and had a relation with something outside the circle of film and cineastes because they were dealing with new visions of sexuality and politics, and a new idea of what film could be. But really this is over. In the eighties, there are other films, based on the formal inventions of this time, and the connection outside the films are completely different. Perhaps today's work is a bit more entertaining, but it also has deep connections with the Zeitgeist.

I think these films, what friends of mine are doing, and especially those friends I invited to make episodes for the *Jesus* film, all these living young experimental filmmakers have more to do with early experimental filmmakers like Rene Clair and Lumiere and Bunuel.

MH:
How do you see that connection?

MB:
They are not fixed in structure, in this formalist stuff. They really want to show something, so they show it. And their mentality, the way they think, has more to do with this strange and fresh - how do you say it in English? (Looking it up) 'Freedom, insolent, cheeky, saucy, impudent...', something like that. They have more to do with that. Sure, it's postmodern, it's what you see in architecture, they make quotations, but they have the freedom to do it without thinking about avant-garde stuff. They all work with the super-8 camera, and open the box and take it, and open a book and take a quotation. You open your mind and take it.

MH:
One of the things that struck me about a number of German filmmakers is that they seemed concerned, even obsessed with this question of the new. There's a lot of festivals in Germany, which allows a tremendous exchange of new work and views to take place beneath a critical scrutiny that's always wary of old styles, old themes. I think the new very quickly becomes old in Germany.

MH:
But if I say 'new', I say it ironically. I don't say, "Here is the 'avant-garde', or 'The Head Of It All'; when you're sailing, the head is the toilet. 'Avant-garde' only exists for historians, retrospectively. If you want to be actual, you have to do your work without thinking of what hasn't been done or taking your place in a line of history. I don't think that every idea is original. The connection which is interesting is that the same ideas grow at the same time in different heads. And my films are a kind of lubricant, they share this sharing. This is really the only point I'm interested insofar as the new is concerned. We don't own our ideas.

MH:
Do you think that there's common themes that characterize super-8 work in Berlin?

MB:

At the moment there are not a lot of films made in super-8 any more. Every year from 1983 to '85, 250 super-8 films were made in Germany, independent films. Now it's half. Our generation from 25-35 started with the super-8 cameras of their fathers, but now they start with video. So there's no real rebirth of the scene.

Lots of people in 1983-85 made 3 or 4 super-8 films and stopped, this is not what they were born for so it's over. And some changed to video. And when you're 30-35 you think about earning money and not everybody has the drive to go this hard way through the institutions and to be free and independent. So some looked for another job at a TV station and stopped doing their own work. Perhaps they're still dreaming about it.

MH:
Working as hard as you do, does it trouble you always dealing with pieces of the past?

MB:
I accept it, I speak about it.

MH:
Because there's already a kind of death there, these images are from a time that's over, that's finished. And to be obsessed, to be surrounding yourself with this dead time, does this trouble you?

MB:
Why should I be troubled? I accept the situation as it is. That's the way of life.

MH:
No, that's the way of film.

MH:
Yeah okay. But every time-structure speaks about ending, about death, and my *Death Dances* speak of narrativity and on this crypt of cinema. Taken altogether its ribbons make a kind of shroud, a world of doubles already dead. If you like I can show you another *Death Dance*, no one's seen it yet.
(He projects *Death Dance 9*)

MB:
The *Death Dances* are a bit of a lexicon, showing a skull in many hands, many situations. They're playful and serious at the same time, and I always strive for this balance, this place between. There is the possibility that people will think about themselves if you have a balance.

MH:

In this film, like *Death Dance 8*, you've used a hand processing technique to show the film's material. This charges the work with a strong emotional current which runs throughout the film.

MB:

Actually I have another version with self-developed material but the image was too poor, too grainy. I refilmed it using two projectors, one showing the abstract roll and the other showing the magician. They ran one on top of the other while I refilmed onto a single strip, gaining the heightened color and grain that comes from re-photography. This was important for its optical sense, its emotion.

MH:

In traditional art terms one speaks about figures and grounds. The ground is the material, flowing through everything, hand processed and abstract. And the figure is the magician, who conjures up the bird and then the skull, and then makes the skull rise and float. Because you've filmed him in a studio setting, with black behind, nothing exists apart from the world he's conjuring up, the world he's created, the world on view. He's so very much alone in this world. It's a bit existential, everything in it exists by his own hand.

MB:

Yes, the film you saw in Osnabrück, *Death Dance 8*, was shot outside, in a special location. Then there are three, four films I made here (at home) using studio black.

PART TWO

Steff Ulbrich and Michael Bryntrup

SU:

Over the years I've noticed an increasing use of the skull in your films. This began as a series of xeroxed passport photos where repeated enlargements revealed a skull waiting in your eye. Then there was *Testamento Memori*, the first of your *Death Dances* (*Totentanze*), which shows you fucking a skull, and in each of the succeeding *Death Dances* you use the skull in some way.

MB:

Death is a theme that emerged quite early and runs through nearly all my films. For me the skull is especially interesting because its symbolic charac-

ter is charged by different parties.

Drawing classes love to use it as a prop, but it's also a sign of fashion, people put them on necklaces. The skull is present in nearly every youth culture - rockers, skins or punks. It's difficult to define exactly, it provokes, but also quotes a condition which defies explanation: the subject of death.

SU:

How do you develop the ideas for your *Death Dances*?

MB:

For me super-8 favors a fragmentary procedure. It's not script writing or preparing a film for three years and shooting it in 14 days. You collect your material with your handy camera. Or you just walk into the world for a day to shoot things you've just thought of, something you've just conceived. Then you outline a small story, an episode, that fits into super-8. The death dances are all episodes or chapters based on a single performer. Like Ichgola (main actor in *Death Dances 6*) for example. I've seen her stage act and we know each other privately quite well. She has similar things in mind, grotesque and weird things but funny at the same time. We'd thought about making a dirty little movie, a *Death Dance* with a lot of meat and blood and a strange guy collecting it. Of course I'd been to the slaughterhouse before, getting eyes of pigs and some guts. But the actual film happened quite unexpectedly, like the good weather. We met at Ichgola's. Her room is a real treasure-chest, a collection of curiosities. We got this and that out and ready, but we didn't know at all where to shoot. We opened the map of the city, but of course everything is pretty limited if you're surrounded by a wall; it's hard to find interesting places to shoot, especially if the theme is nature. So we picked out the tiny blue dots on the map, little ponds and suchlike. Then we headed directly for one of these dots but couldn't find it. It seemed to be a printing mistake on the map. We asked around and later came up with a pond between buildings. Though this wasn't on the map, we shot it, and if you watch the footage it seems to be total solitude, marshland, endless nature before the horizon. In fact we had to cut out poles and wires by finding clever angles. That's how Ichgola's *Death Dance* was produced. The story

developed at the location, more or less. And the other *Death Dances* are similar: each shows the interaction of a protagonist with a surround which includes the skull.

SU:

Your work foregrounds das Deutsche (Germanness). Why insist on your German past?

MH:

In *Der Rhein - Ein Deutsches Marchen* (*The Rhine - A German Fairytale*) I didn't make a statement on National Socialism but on the Germany of the 'economic miracle'. It's that time which has shaped us and in which we grew up. That belongs to my person and to the present time. I can't imagine reappraising an aspect of German history, not even the persecution of homosexuals during the Third Reich, even in the form of documentary fiction. I regard it as completely unnecessary to present my opinion on that; I don't consider myself competent to do so. There are other things which are closer to myself and more concrete. Persecution of homosexuals still exists today and I think it's important to report this as I've experienced it myself.

SU:

But you don't seem to deal with homosexuality apart from a certain attitude.

MH:

I think it's clear that my films have been made by a gay filmmaker. Without making explicitly gay films, my work includes certain gay moments. Take the *Stummfilm*, for example. You see these cards which introduce sign language for the deaf when suddenly and inexplicably the sign representing homosexuality appears. This is one level. The *Tabufilme* is much more personal. I speak a lot about my own coming-out. Or the *Death Dances*, I consider them very gay, especially in the age of AIDS.

SU:

What was your aim with the *Tabufilme* (*Taboo Films*)?

MB:

The *Tabufilme* don't ask, "W hat did Michael Bryntrup do on the 12th of May, 1989?" They are concerned with what a diary is. Does it include taboos? What are the conditions for diary writing? What is already predetermined by the diary medium? It seems that only in retrospect, through history, that events gain meaning and become categorized. This is the

O V E R T H E W A I L

main point in my *Tabu I-IV* films.

Tabu I, the first diary, focuses on my surgery. The second gathers material under a separate theme, confusion and coming out. The third diary makes it clear that the *Tabufilm* is a film, just that, the single pages of the diary become animated, something is moving inside the diary itself, and in the fourth diary, a concrete situation is recorded as in screenplays. Its long ending brings the viewer back to the present, to the act of watching the film. I think the act of the diary is important, that history is made in the present. You don't organize your life by means of a diary, you create a diary and your life as well, again and again.

SU:

You presented your diary as a guestbook at the premiere party, but no one wanted to write anything in it.

■■■

Privacy is one of the last taboos. I wanted to confront people with it when I asked them to write in my diary. Finally it's always you who sets the taboo. You decide how far you want to go: to respect privacy or leaf through the diary or even write something in it. This play happened in front of a mirror. My work is never easy-going or purely sympathetic. Those who watch my movies always have to reflect on themselves as well. Take the long ending as an example: they realize the movie isn't over yet, that they are sitting on a hard chair getting a sore butt. I drag them out of the illusion which every film creates, away from fascination. I try to work on a structure which returns people to themselves. I don't offer figures of identification. The viewer can only identify with him/herself.

SU:

So you don't make entertaining movies?

■■■

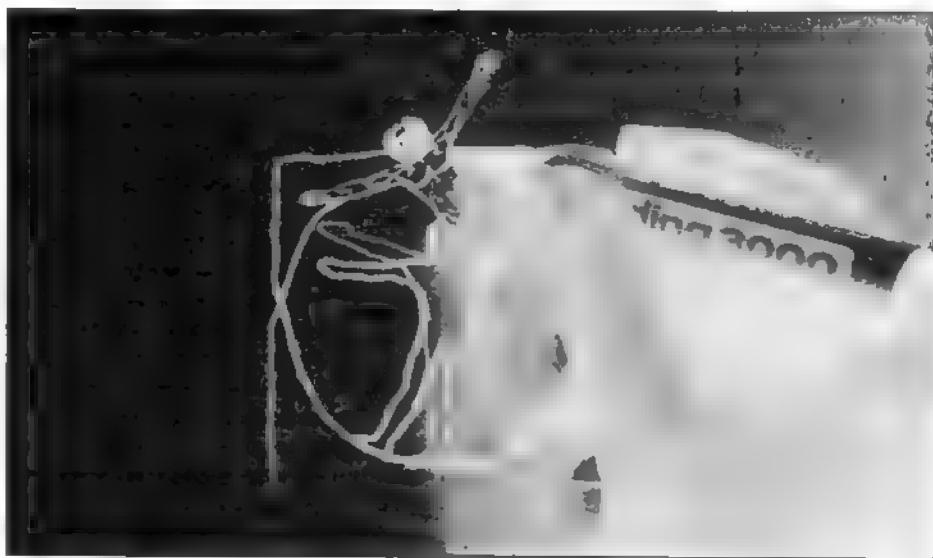
Well, I don't want to make films without an edge, which will be forgotten in a minute. My films require work while watching them.

SU:

Is that why you use these coded, mysterious symbols?

MB:

Symbols always show two faces. Their history accumulates different meanings, so in the present their meaning is both particular and open to interpretation. For example, the hand is a theme that runs through most of my work. Perhaps it has



HÖLLENSIMULATION

something to do with the fact that my hand came into consciousness as my first body part. And in puberty, a friend I desired sexually made a remark about my beautiful hand. The hand is a medium, something intellectual, it leaves behind a sign, a mark of its passing, like the markings of the palm. Maybe the hand is only a microcosm representing the entire body, the entire life, the entire world.

The skull is another story. It's linked for me to the awakening consciousness of individualism. This also explains my preference for mannerism, which is the period in history when the event of the individual occurred. Especially interesting is the rejection of formalism, the rejection of theories which tried to cover nature and vision by law. It's interesting that mannerism defined itself by what it rejected, which means it was negative first of all. But at the same time it managed to show all that a centralized perspective left behind, its free spirit of fantasy lived in the borders, the margins of this perspective.

And my work is the same. Something outrageous and comic happens. You might follow the storyline with interest, but after the film's done you just shake your head and wonder: What the hell was that? And this is the point, to guide people on a complicated path to another state of mind, a path they'll understand much later on. I don't want to make a statement here and now, which you might answer somehow with arguments,

and then this would have to be discussed, and we'd have to come up with a joint resolution. Not all that crap which represents the stability of the whole system, but simply to point towards a region in every human being, in every subjectivity, where other things count besides words.

MICHAEL BRYNNTRUP FILMOGRAPHY

- 1981/82 *September, Wut, eine Reise* (Spielfilm, 82 min.)
- 1983 *Todesstreifen - ein Deutscher Film* (Triple Projection 9 min.); *The Rhine - A German Fairy Tale* (14 min.)
- 1983/4 *Orpheus* (22 min.)
- 1984 *Silent Movie for the Deaf* (8 min.); *Aus Vier Jahreszeiten* (4 min.); *Firm hand-voluntary self control* (17 min.)
- 1985 *Musterhaft - das Ende, ein Intermezzo* (8 min.)
- 1985/6 *Jesus - The Film* (20 authors, two versions: 84/125 min.)
- 1986 *My Last Testament* (8 min.)
- 1986/7 *Veronika (vera ikon)* 11 min.
- 1987 *Hollensimulation - frei nach Platos Hohlengleichnis* (8 min.); *Pause* (3 min.)
- 1988 *The Ivory Elephant, Death Dances 1-3* (10 min.); *Taboo 1-IV* (28 min.)
- 1989 *Das Zauberei, Death Dance 5* (6 min.); *Der Hieronymus, Death Dance 6* (7 min.); *Death Dance 7* (7 min.); *The Message, Death Dance 8* (10 min.); *Death Dance 9*.



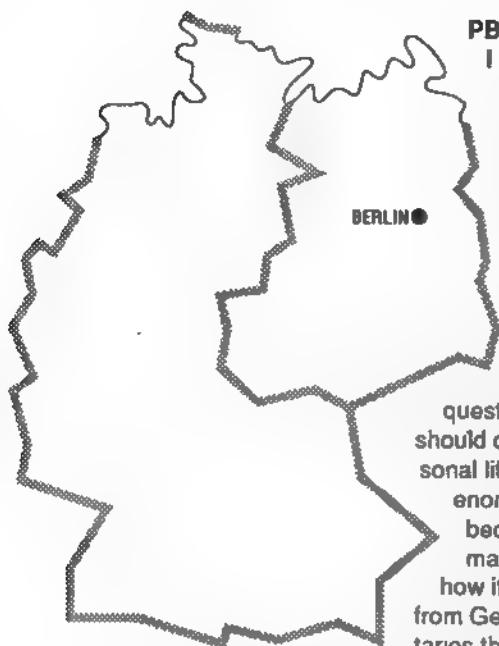
LLAW

GUNS GIRLS AND GUERRILLAS

an interview with
PENELOPE BUITENHUIS

PENELOPE BUITENHUIS is a Canadian independent filmmaker who has been living and working in West Berlin for the last five years. She has produced and directed 15 short films in Canada, the U.S. and West Germany and recently began directing for German television. Her 'new narrative' works are set in the ghettos of urban centres - New York, Berlin, Toronto, Vancouver and Rome - and edited in such a way that the cities become one decaying metropolis. Working primarily in super-8, Buitenhuis is concerned with the interface of popular culture, political consciousness and human experience within the frame of the urban landscape. The filmmaker has worked with Dutch and German musicians to create original, vibrant soundtracks to accompany her films.

O V E R T H E W A L L



PB:

I started making *They Shoot Pigs Don't They?* when I came down to San Francisco in 1987 to show political documentaries from Germany about the census. I don't know if you heard about it here. It's an obligatory census that everybody had to fill out about their income and personal statistics and if you don't comply there's a 500 mark fine. It posed questions about what the government should or shouldn't know about your personal life. I wanted to expose this enormous resistance to America because we tend to give out information so willingly, without knowing how it's going to be used. On the way from Germany to show these documentaries they wouldn't let me into the States and they were very suspicious about the tapes. In the end, they found me in the computer and it turned out there was a warrant for my arrest for some car insurance thing from 5 years before which I didn't know about. I was handcuffed at the airport and taken to the police station and basically, that started my rage against police. That summer I'd been stopped by police a number of times and taken in for ridiculous reasons. Charges were always dropped, but I sort of felt..

MH:

This was in Germany?

PB:

In Vancouver. I felt there was a real tendency in Canada, more so than in Germany, towards a kind of vigilante police activity. If the guy didn't like your face or the way you talked or if you said what you thought about things, then it was quite easy to have false charges laid against you. I'm a white middle-class person, so I can imagine for other people it must be a lot worse.

It was ironic because I was coming to San Francisco to show how the computer is used against the individual, and that's just what happened to me. There's quite a strong anarchist community in San Francisco and I asked some people if they would like to do this film with me. In the two scenes with the two pigs watching television, the actors are two San Francisco guys; one is a singer from the Dicks. That was all I ended up shooting there. It became too chaotic. I

had written this script very quickly and it wasn't ready, so I dropped the idea and continued in Berlin with the manifesto section, where the women speak on television and give a manifesto about police brutality and the killing of this black guy. It was an ongoing process for the next 3 years, shooting bits in New York and Berlin and Vancouver. I didn't ever write a full script, I adapted it as I went along.

I wanted to show that certain portions of society never get media access, and that the only way to get it is to forcefully take it. The other thing about the film is that in Germany, particularly, there's a nostalgia for revolutionary images: Baader Meinhoff, Che Guevara, the fist, the black flag, all these things that are constantly re-used in demonstrations and leftist rhetoric. I feel those kind of symbols and "Down with Imperialism" rhetoric is no longer applicable today and that a new form of resistance has to be developed. Constantly recalling this sort of nostalgic imagery of revolution makes it absurd. The main character in the film, Yvonne, the black woman, is surrounded by these posters, and she's obviously a part of this imagery, affected by it. At the same time, she's never lived a revolution in her generation, so in a way it's a dream that's never been fulfilled.

What triggers events in the film is the killing of this man Keane in Harlem by police who claimed afterwards he was a crack dealer. But neighbours said he'd never been involved with crack, he was an accountant. The cops said they found a vial of crack in his larynx, which everyone claimed they planted after he was killed to justify it. In *They Shoot Pigs the Women Attack Pigs Revolution* begins with a takeover of ABC and a national broadcast that reads an anti-Pig manifesto. Then police all over the streets become the targets of this revolutionary coalition. Eventually some members get hurt and the revolution is called off to avoid any more bloodshed. The remaining members hijack a plane to Germany, to start again. In the end the film fails because it's not clear enough. In a way it becomes a slapstick comedy about revolution. They end up hitting police on the head with sticks but, what I'm really getting at is that these ideas of takeover are really not feasible any more, and thinking they are

MH:

Where did you learn about filmmaking?

PB:

I tried to get into a school in Paris but my residency papers didn't come through at the last minute. As a contingency plan, I'd applied to Simon Fraser University because I heard it was one of the few schools that didn't follow a commercial vein and they paid for your filmmaking. I never had any money, so if I was going to do it, I had to do it there. I never considered movies an art form, I just went for fun, like every other kid. When I was 18, I got this education about European film and realized there were other possibilities. I was outraged that I hadn't even heard about this work. I think it's still true, that unless you live in the privileged artistic world you don't hear anything about it.

After the course I went to Paris and got involved with some documentary filmmakers and got the bug. I also realized that Paris wasn't the place to be a female filmmaker. I wasn't interested in being an actress or anything and they could never understand why I would want to learn anything technical. Editors and script girls are about the only roles open in Latin countries for women. It's very much a man's world. Canada's the same but Germany has women working in all facets of filmmaking.

MH:

Tell me about *They Shoot Pigs Don't They?*

is really fantasy.

MH:

Within the organization of the revolutionary group a very distinct hierarchy is set up. There's a couple of people who talk and the rest follow their orders. Yet one of the things they're fighting against is exactly this alienation of duties and responsibilities - that if it's your job to do something you should control how that job is done. They're protesting a lack of media access which has become too centralized, which we can only passively accept into our living rooms, and yet this same kind of top/bottom split exists within the group itself.

PB:

Anarchy's idea of all leading all is a nice idea but this quickly becomes chaos, so, in a sense I criticize the idea of anarchy as much as dictatorship. In the revolutionary groups of the past there were leaders. That's the only way it could work.

MH:

But the operation of the squats was co-operative in a way that seems to underline much of what's politically/

collaboration is itself an image of a different kind of social order. Even in a small way it pushes against Western ideals of the romantic individual, signing the film.

PB:

I think that's valid. In non-urgent situations, collaboration and non-individualism can function, but in situations of direct action, I don't think it can.

MH:

And how do you see your film-making in relation to that?

PB:

Part of my mandate in making films is that because I can't pay anybody, I allow them as much creative input as they wish as compensation for not being able to reimburse them in any other way. The women reading the manifesto made a lot of changes to it. They decided on how the choreography of the guys behind them would be, and the costumes they wore, for instance. I didn't tell them to wear black bras, that's how they showed up. I said, "You're supposed to be tough leaders - interpret that how you will" and that's what they decided, which I thought

do. I did the same with the soundtrack: I gave the Rude Angels, a band from Berlin, free rein. I would go in every couple of days and listen to it and if I really didn't like it, I would talk to them, but basically I didn't tell them what I wanted. I do that with almost everybody.

MH:

Guns are a recurrent motif.

PB:

For me it's amazing that they could take guns away in America and drop the murder rate by half. Guns are such a cold way of killing, you don't need any physical contact. In Europe a lot of people are uncomfortable with my use of guns all the time, but I'm really uncomfortable with America's use of guns. People I would never imagine have them in their homes. The gun is an admission that you're prepared to kill.

MH:

But you show people getting killed.

PB:

But in *They Shoot Pigs Don't They?* it's done in a very slapstick way.

MH:

The black man?

PB:

That's the one element that actually happened, that this guy was killed, and for that reason I made that quite graphic. It's not a revolutionary dream, he died unjustly at the hands of the police. Not to forget.

MH:

But isn't the proliferation of guns in the States doubled by the proliferation of guns in your films?

PB:

Because I'm a non-violent person, this apparatus that makes violence so easy fascinates me. I don't understand it.

MH:

As you use the image more and more, do you understand it better?

PB:

THEY SHOOT PIGS

No. I use it as a cliche or simple representation of death like they do in Hollywood. I can't imagine someone stopping breathing because I'm pulling the trigger. Most of my guns are



culturally vital in Berlin. These squats might house groups of filmmakers who would work collaboratively, and this

was quite amusing. Some feminists feel uncomfortable with that representation, but that's what those women chose to

plastic.

MH:

I studied film in Oakville, and at the end of the year everyone sits down to watch the hundreds of films produced. I was shocked by what I saw - it was an endless display of killing, with every means you could imagine and then some. It was violence imaged by people who'd never experienced it, Quinn Martin memories, an image of an image. It was a chilling feeling. So much of experimental film has very little to do with violence.

PB:

I was amazed at the Experimental Film Congress how few films had any people in them at all.

MH:

That's not representative.

PB:

Is it a collective denial? Perhaps there's enough violence in other forms of representation that we can leave it out in ours. *Pigs* takes place in New York, which is a very violent city, and the cops are everywhere showing their cocks, their guns. It's there in the papers everyday, I just can't seem to get away from it. But *They Shoot Pigs* is also a criticism of revolutionary forms because violence creates violence. Any revolution that tries to undermine a system often ends up using the apparatus they're fighting against, and that I'm against. Unfortunately, though, to fight you often have to use the same method of destruction.

MH:

Or using a means of communication that people can understand, using dramatic forms for instance. It's confounding - on the one hand it's not understood, on the other it's appropriated.

PB:

In *They Shoot Pigs* there's only once that a policeman is killed, with a knife. Mostly they're just injured. There's a difference in who's using the guns; only the police are shooting.

MH:

What about the way the film functions? Who would see a film like this?

PB:

Generally I'm a kind of pack rat filmmaker. I just take my films around, like I am now, to the Euclid or the MOMA or the American Institute of Film in Washington. I push myself, since my experience for short films and no-budget



Penelope Buitenhuis



FRAMED

films has been that there isn't a lot of incentive for distribution companies to push them. There's no money in it.

MH:

But do you see the films working as a form of direct action? How do they function politically?

PB:

The reaction in Europe has always been very interesting because although I live in Germany, much of my work is based in America and American culture. Even people in alternative cultures have a certain image of America which I think is incorrect. They assume a very glossy, complete picture, so people are often surprised at the decaying ghettos I show. I inform Europeans of a subcultural existence they might not be aware of. The most insight comes out in discussion, rather than in direct response to the film, because when I show my films six at a time it's a real overload of information and images. People are overwhelmed. Response comes when we start talking.

For instance, *Disposable*, which is about disposable North American culture, is an ironic idea for Europeans because they're surrounded with tradition and history. They don't even realize how much tradition plays a part in their way of thinking and those that do suggest it's an impedance to your freedom of thinking, a

weight they're forced to carry. *Disposable* is set in an America which has turned its shorter history into a very disposable form of culture, with television and magazines that are gone tomorrow, that foster a cultural amnesia. That leaves museums and institutions as the places of our public memory and I feel uncomfortable with that agenda. If you're in Paris or Berlin the shape of your space, the architecture, the statues and monuments, are a constant reminder of what went on before. In North America it's difficult to remember anything.

MH:

North American experience was founded on removing our indigenous people, our foundation is already one of erasure and genocide. *Disposable* takes up this question of the custodians of memory. You show two men, one arguing for the importance of the past, the other lost in the present.

PB:

As an artist both have validity. Europeans envy America because an intuitive response to image making still seems possible. But I don't think we're children; it's not possible to be naive or to go back, any more than it is for the Europeans.

MH:

Your film work is also straining the traditions of a certain kind of experimental film work.

PB:

Even though I really enjoyed working in an experimental vein, when I took my

films around to places that didn't necessarily have films audiences I would lose them when it became too obscure or experimental. I want to form another kind of narrative, a new narrative that's not linear in its juxtaposition of sound and image, and tries to disturb the typical formulas of narrative film. I want to make it entertaining for people to watch. I don't want to lose them. I'm very much against this tendency in North America, with its endless superimpositions and text, to the point that I lose what's going on; it becomes intellectual masturbation. Maybe it works for other film-makers, but my purpose is not to preach to my own kind.

I've shown just about everywhere, in warehouses, and cafes and outside, really trying to reach other kinds of audiences. A lot of peoples' response is, "Oh, we've never seen stuff like that, this is really strange, I never knew stuff like this existed" and that's what I want to get at. I want people to realize there are other ways of telling stories or talking about issues or presenting opinions, but I think it's necessary to maintain a certain narrative line. So, in the last 6 years, I've turned much more towards narrative.

MH:

What about the people who say that your work casts off the tradition of experimental film entirely, that there's nothing left of it any more, it's not experimental, it's something else?

PB:

"Experimental" means in any form or way in which you wish to make it. Experimental lies outside mainstream form, and beyond that, I'd say it's free rein. At the Experimental Film Congress in Toronto there seemed to be a definite definition of what constituted experimental film, which I found shocking. How could there be? How could it continue being experimental if it could be pinned down beneath the words?

Curiosity towards other forms of communication has dwindled because it's not so new any more, and a lot of people are fed up with obscurity and don't want to see that. I have to say, at the Experimental Film Congress I really sat back and wondered, "What were they saying in that film?" I didn't understand some of the work, and I'm an educated filmgoer, so I can imagine for the uninitiated it

must have been totally confusing. I'm not suggesting you need to dictate what you're saying, but why do you make images? You want to bring something across to people. You don't want to leave them totally confused when they leave. What I was very annoyed with at the Congress was that new narrative, in a sense, already seemed like a cop-out, and I disagree: I think new narrative is a way we have to go now to be able to reach an audience that is fed up with experimental obscurity or endless superimpositions or layering text. I'm trying to make experimental film fun to watch, and I don't think that's such a bad thing!

MH:

Purely formal film experiments seem increasingly to emerge from a certain kind of privilege, a class privilege, that has the time to worry about things like 'film as film'. As well the increasingly academic and institutionalized context for work is heading production off in a certain direction. Because the universities are the ones interested, work is unwittingly designed for that context or buried altogether, and that's why work is becoming increasingly insular and cut away from any kind of audience at all.

PB:

I agree. I'm continually shocked at the similarity of films to one another in Canadian festivals. At the Insight Festival in Edmonton, all the documentaries took a certain form that spoke of the NFB; the experimental work took this very obscure academic form, and when I showed my work, people were really shocked because it didn't fit.

Although people think of German film as being innovative, they don't have nearly the history of experimental film that we do in America. It's not institutionalized like it is here. At film school they don't learn about Stan Brakhage or things like that. Film theory is not nearly so prevalent in Europe as it is here, generally film schools teach you how to make film, and, as a result, they're not so patient with experimental forms.

MH:

One thing that's different between your work and a lot of the other German stuff I saw is that a lot of filmmakers have a very strong aversion to language. Long stretches of work will have no dialogue or titles, whereas North Americans seem

obsessed with text. Your work is relatively wordy when compared with other German work.

PB:

As an English-speaking person in Germany I have a different relation to language, even though I speak German.

MH:

When Tom Chomont, a New York filmmaker, was traveling through Europe he couldn't ever afford to stay in one place so he ended up making work which was silent, without any language, because he was constantly put in situations where he couldn't understand the language and was forced to find some other way to communicate.

PB:

I think a lot of the sounds provide a non-verbal dialogue, I think sound is an international form of communication, it triggers thoughts and associations. But particularly in Germany, where language has been abused by Hitler and other great orators, filmmakers are wary of their own language because of the way it was used under fascism. Words don't seem the same now. English can be brief and succinct in a way that isn't possible in German, it doesn't have the same freedom of juxtaposition. In English you can put words next to one another in a stream-of-consciousness which is understandable because the words have an integral meaning in themselves. But in German each word is very dependent on the words surrounding it. So you can't free it from its history, its weight. Because I'm not German I look at the way they've put their language together - like the word 'geschlechtsverkehr' which means copulation, and in it is the word 'schlecht', which means bad and 'verkehr' which is traffic. I used to think it meant 'bad traffic'. But they can't see that the word holds its own moral. When you're in your own language you don't realize the way it's been impregnated by culture, the way your mouth shapes your understanding.

Or 'Leidenschaft' which means passion and 'leid' is pain. The Germans never notice of course, just as we don't. In the same way experimental film is concerned with the form, of how you do something, and when you make the form strange you're able to see it, until the form becomes too strange and you can't see it at all.

O V E R T H E W A L L

MH:

Tell me about *Disposable*.

PB:

That was shot in New York and Toronto with Samantha Hermenes. Samantha is extremely talented but she doesn't use it, so whenever I see her I push her to work with me. I came to Toronto and she's always felt like an outsider there because of the sex change so I said, "You should come to New York and why don't we write a film that we'll shoot in two days?" So we wrote the script in a day and shot it in two days. The idea was to try to show that living in a big city it's necessary to become indifferent to the horrors you see around you. I still get tears in my eyes when I see the bag ladies in New York. But to survive you have to build up a certain indifference to remain optimistic and creative. So this woman sees a lot of

she gets kicked out, but nothing really gets inside. Then it turns out that the events that happened have been planned by a guy whose trying to inflict his paranoia on her. He's bothered by the fact that she can live without being affected. All the things that have happened to her have been set up for her to see.

MH:

Scripted.

PB:

Yeah, it's very much to do with constructing the film. The paranoid guy is also like the filmmaker who's saying all these events were no accident. She says she'll stay indifferent and survive. People said that's a call for apathy but I don't think so.

MH:

The paranoid person is suggesting to her

she's implicated. The paranoid relates to her in the form of a letter which she opens at the end, detailing the events of her day, showing their origin in the word. This letter has the form of a script, and this person then becomes analogous to a filmmaker. Is there a necessary relation between filmmaking and paranoia?

PB:

Most filmmakers are paranoid about understanding. That's why they make dramas.

MH:

Two thing in her apartment seems to offer her some degree of comfort: her parrot and her mirror. I think there's a distinct narcissism at work, she's able to escape from her surround in the image of herself.

PB:

She's an extreme case. After she's cut off the world all she has left is herself. The mirror falls because of the violence of the argument next door,

and this splintering of the mirror shows the outside world really stepping into her life, breaking her image. That's when she gets the angriest.

MH:

There's a suggestion that there is no outside, that it's impossible to be alone.

PB:

That's why it all continues even when she gets home. The neighbours are fighting, the landlord boots her out, the paranoid telephones. In the film I use a heavy soundtrack by Mechanik Kom-



DIFFERENT

ugly things which she ignores, they're an everyday occurrence. She passes a murder, a dope deal, arguments and corpses. She's even blasé about her personal life, her apartment is trashed,

that all of these events - the murder, the dope deal, the person lying dead by the sidewalk - that seem circumstantial are all coming from one place. They make up a narrative of which she's a part,

mando because in New York you never escape the noise. I couldn't live there because of the overwhelming sound. You're never out of New York when you're there.

MH:

There's an analogy between being surrounded by sound and the way we're filled with images all the time. I've been trying to imagine a time when you would have to go somewhere to see an image of any kind, that they should be so rare, it would take a special effort to see them. Given that everyone who's looking at your work has, by the ripe old age of ten, seen more images than they could ever



INDIFFERENCE

remember, and that these images are ordered in a particular way, how do your films function against all that?

PB:

All my films are shot in ghettos, decaying parts of the world. It's not random where I shoot or who's in them. Fighting the Hollywood image thing is impossible, but despite their image overdose, people

come out of my work with some sense of the homeless, unjust, fragmentary, dirty, decaying world. I think the impression leaves a mark that doesn't become part of the background. A lot of that has to do with the soundtracks. For far too long sound has been secondary to image but I try to bring it forward, to make them equal.

MH:

What's the film that's shot off the television set?

PB:

Combat not Conform. 4 minutes. It's basically a summary of activities and demonstrations. Now it's irrelevant because Reagan is in it. The demonstrations were against nuclear plants which were good for business, for the pre-eminent value in the world, for money. Inside of all this a few people

are trying to fight for something fundamental: no nuclear weapons in our country. I wanted to make an image of this resistance, to show it's still possible.

MH:

Tell me about your new film.

PB:

It's called *L/wall* which is wall spelt backwards. It's a personal diary about the days leading up to and succeeding the crumbling of the wall. I was in the woods of British Columbia this summer writing a script and I kept seeing via satellite all these reports about mass exodus from East Germany. Everyone said to me, 'You should be back in Ger-

many, it's really exciting', but I wondered what difference it would make. But it seemed ironic to be sitting ten hours from any city and still seeing images of what was happening at home, or what I call home. I returned to Berlin on the 3rd of November. Six days later the wall came down.

The film begins in the woods of British Columbia and pixillates into the wall. It

starts with November 2, with narration over the titles about being in BC. Then it questions Gorbachev with a scratch track - "Did you ever think it would happen so fast? How can you sleep at night?" that repeats over various images of Gorbachev.

On Nov. 4 there was a demonstration of 1.5 million people in Berlin Alexanderplatz which was broadcast on East German television and they were saying extremely subversive things, that the government should step down, they'd had 40 years of oppression and now it was over. Writers, intellectuals and poets spoke in front of this mass of people. I watched it with a number of people who'd escaped from East Germany and they were stunned at what was being said on television to the whole country. We knew at that point there was no turning back, that it was just a matter of time. That broadcast said it all.

On Nov. 9 the wall came down - I was on the way to a concert of Faith in the War. I heard it on the subway at 7 pm and everyone started shouting. My equipment was locked in my apartment which had been confiscated, I was having personal problems, so I didn't get my camera until Nov. 11 so visually I shot off the TV and shot a lot afterwards.

Nov. 10 begins a metaphorical dialogue between east and west. It's set in the hallways of Britannia House, and revolves around the idea that we've been enemies for forty years but all of a sudden we've decided none of that was necessary any more. We see the camera move into a room where a couple beat up on each other and kiss in the end. This is intercut with images of 1961 when the wall went up and images of today when guards are standing at the top of the wall and people are handing them flowers. That's the power structure metaphor.

The next day is Nov. 11, photographed in the next hallway. It's about people getting 100 marks when they come over, the whole money game. Inside the room a business man opens up a suitcase filled with money and tries to give it to the same woman as before now dressed as a typical communist (laughs) and she's reading a book and trying to ignore it but eventually she takes it and stuffs it in her pocket and

O V E R T H E W A L L

eats bananas. Bananas became a symbol of capitalism and exoticism because they don't have bananas in East Berlin, so when they saw this fruit in West Berlin—

■■■
They went bananas.

■■■
Exactly. The third scene had to do with the marketing of the wall, the selling of freedom and democracy. An American consortium offered \$50 million to buy the wall but I don't think they're going to get it now, both the British and French Museum have stakes. The whole world wants a piece of history. There's not going to be much left at the end of it, everybody's chipped away so much of it. Everybody wants it. I call it the pet rock of history.

The last section shows a woman lying in front of her TV. An American survey taken after every major broadcaster was talking live from the Brandenburg Gates, showed that after five minutes most Americans switched the channel, so history brought the ratings down.
(laughs) The film's about the media spectacle, cashing in on the events of history. The last statement goes: "History makes me suspicious who will be the next enemy." It's about the artificiality of politics.

MH:

When the news reports started coming up about the wall I imagined all the people I spoke with in Berlin - Ulrich, Bryntrup, Schillinger and all the rest - beginning to make work about it. That the wall would create a whole new genre of filmmaking. No sooner did I get back than you arrived with *L/wa*.

■■■

Everyone was there with a camera, looking at everyone else who was there with a camera. A lot of people were chipping away at the wall which is a crime because the wall belongs to the east. At the beginning they tried to arrest a few people but in the end they gave up because everybody was doing it. But it's not that easy to get a piece because cement doesn't chip that well, and the only people who made a profit are the ones who came with jackhammers. West Berlin became horribly crowded, the subway was impossible, the shops were filled, the smog was unbelievable

because the East German cars have no emission controls, and everything was sold out. So all of a sudden your normal everyday life was like New Delhi. A lot of West Berliners were fed up with the whole thing just in practical terms. I left on Dec. 23 and it still hadn't gone back to normal. Friends of mine were disturbed because they'd spoken up in the past and had to go to prison or leave as a result, but when a mass movement begins everyone sings along. My friends from the East are looking at all these

something special. The strangeness of its circumstance brought many international artists to Berlin. That's over now. Everyone's wondering how the culture of Berlin will survive.

In 1984 I made a film about squatting in London, Amsterdam and Berlin. I was fascinated, and it was really cheap, and where I was living at the time, in Paris, it was very expensive and there was little alternative culture. So I moved to Berlin. There aren't many places that have a strong alternative movement with an audience and a press. Berlin is fantastic. Super-8 in Berlin is respected, I get a whole page in the newspaper about my work. People are really curious, and I never found that anywhere else. It's cheap to work, there's a co-operative mentality, there's not a hierarchy of importance. They're more interested in what you're showing, not the format. Now I'm quite well known and there's the possibility of doing longer, more

expensive things. I feel like there's potential there. Everything's possible there because in Berlin there are no rules. I think Germans are quite open to seeing different kinds of work. I don't think that's true in Canada.



right wing assholes who never said anything before and wondering what's up. A recent Spiegel report claimed that 30% of the East Germans are fascist. So there's a lot of questionable things happening. The reforms are good, but does that mean that Eastern Europe will become another capitalist stronghold, another market? There's a striking juxtaposition between the events in Eastern Europe and the American invasion of Panama - is this the freedom everyone's moving towards?

■■■
The real question is - what kind of shape will an oppositional force assume? How is it possible?

■■■
There was a crazy euphoria that's still going on in a way. When I go back I'm going to go show my work in East Berlin and take my bike into the countryside. But the artistic world is frightened because Berlin's peculiarity came in part from being surrounded by a wall, it had

PENELOPE BUITENHUIS FILMOGRAPHY

- 1981 *Granville Alley; Motion Still Abstraction*
- 1982 *Wasting Time in Black and White*
- 1983 *Word Continuum in Spite of Surface Eraser*
- 1984 *We Just Want To Live Here; Alternative Squatting*
- 1985 *Drawing Attention*
- 1986 *Disposable; Periphery; Framed*
- 1987 *Movimento; Combat Not Conform; Indifference*
- 1989 *They Shoot Pigs Don't They?*,
1990 *L/wa*

G

E

R

M

A

N

Y

FASCISM *& the* Fantastic



an interview with STEPHAN SACHS

STEPHAN SACHS is a 32 year old experimental filmmaker working in Düsseldorf. After going to art school in France in the late '70s he began work in film, completing eleven short films over the course of the '80s. His work interrogates romantic myths of masculinity, German identity and the exotic, using methods that are at once expressive and intellectual. A consummate technician, Sachs has made two home-brew optical printers and a circular movie screen for installation work. He completed his last film in 1987 entitled *PARAMOUNT*, which features his friend and fellow-filmmaker Klaus Telscher. *PARAMOUNT* replays the German mountain film of the 1930s, a film form whose icy ascents set the psychological stage for Germany's entry into World War Two.

O V E R T H E W A L L

MH:

When did you start making films?

SS:

Ten years ago.

MH:

Because you were in art school?

SS:

It developed slowly. I started to study art in France, and while there were many different subjects film was not included. I always made a lot of serial photography. Then I began doing slide work, then slide work with soundtracks, then a special track to synch sound and image (laughs), so at the end it was very close to film. Then I moved to Düsseldorf. I thought they would have more film equipment in Düsseldorf, which wasn't really true. I still painted and made photographs, but film became more important until now I haven't painted for years and don't make many stills.

MH:

Was there a co-op in Düsseldorf with equipment you could use?

SS:

Yes, there is one. The co-op has maybe sixty members but most are not active. They have super-8 and 16mm equipment, editing tables, good sound equipment, Arriflex and Nagras, but no frame by frame cameras. They're not really equipped for very experimental work because not many people are making it.

MH:

Is the co-op the centre of the 'film scene' in Düsseldorf?

SS:

Ten years ago the Düsseldorf Art Academy had a film section and some documentary filmmakers emerged. Their work is very political but in a conventional way. The Academy closed it because they thought it didn't have much to do with art any more. Some of these people began the co-op which is now a part of the Düsseldorf film institute. There is also a Kommunale Kino.

MH:

Is the Kino where you can show your work?

SS:

Yes, it's a very good one. Whenever I have a new film I can show it there no problem. Once a week there's an evening of experimental film. It's very regular and that's important for Düsseldorf. It's normally not so easy to see

them.

SS:

Was that happening already when you came to Düsseldorf?

SS:

Yes, I saw a lot of classical experimental cinema - Richter, Eggeling, Bunuel, Deren, Brakhage and newer work from Germany, not only the classics but other generations, which is important.

MH:

What did you make in Düsseldorf?

SS:

I made *Verelsung* in the subway here, a year after coming to the art academy.

MH:

Did the film start because you were watching them rebuild the subways?

SS:

No, I was looking for different rooms and found this subway in construction. The film begins with immense rooms that become smaller. At the beginning it's very static and objects move while at the end the camera moves when I run through very narrow rooms. That film was the beginning. I made a script, and drew pictures and looked for them. *Verelsung* was made in 16mm. After that I began to use super-8, shooting spontaneously for the first time without a film in mind.

At the same time I was painting and making objects. Later I discovered pieces that fit together and common themes. But there were only small pieces of film I really liked. I had to do something to extend the material because you can't do much with only three metres of super-8. So I began to make my first optical printer with a small projector. The first result was *Fa(h)r (weit)*. I made several other tries but they never became finished films. The whole film was made in super-8, much of it on the printer. But at the Academy, and everywhere else, the super-8 projection is always bad, so later on I remade the film on my second printer.

MH:

Can you describe what the film looks like?

SS:

It's built in long takes. The opening shows a freighter being untied from its

mooring, shot from above - we see the anchoring ropeline and movements of the sailors. The second section shows a fixed line, a metal rail with the moving horizon behind. Now the voyage really begins. Its movements are very musical. Normally the horizon is fixed for the eye, but now it swings up and down, like a wave. This wave motion was changed on the printer until it became like breath for me. When you see it on a big screen you nearly get seasick. After that it goes into the inside of the boat, moving towards a



diagonal line. Then it moves into a completely abstract section taken from the overhead wires of a train. These are worked in a very musical way. Both the rope at the beginning and the wires at the end mark a diagonal line across the frame. In between you have a movement between the horizontal to the diagonal. These two kinds of travels are movements into abstraction. You have the impression of things moving but it's not true, it's you moving. In fact it's only cinema, only film.

MH:

The beginning of the film shows the beginning of a voyage, moments of preparation in which something is let go in order for the boat to go on alone, an autonomous structure loosed from land. Abstract art, loosed from its signified, also holds a kind of autonomy. These gestures of autonomy and enclosure, of an artmaking preconditioned by a leave

taking of land, of this world, and of its eventual return as a purely abstract design of line, form, rhythm and tempo seem to mark this film as essentially modernist.

SS:

The movements of the crew around the rope that casts the ship away at the film's beginning was very wonderful for me. It was like a theatre piece I happened on; I couldn't have constructed it. To see it later was marvellous.

MH:

And the title?

SS:

It's a word game - 'fahr' means to go, to

like a park is. It's shot frame by frame from one point, through a piece of glass which shows at the same time a panoramic view and a view of the sky. Two levels: one horizontal, one vertical. I shot over several days and the view depends on the relative illumination from both levels. The beginning is very slow, freeze framed, then the movement builds through a kind of choreography to a summit, where it moves so quickly you lose your point of centering. You have to concentrate on just one of the movements, you can't see them together. In the end I made brief shots with a flash at night which gives the illusion of a very

fiction movie, but with your eyes. These two movies are silent; they have to be because they're musical, the music is in the image.

MH:

How do you feel that this film - with its circularity, the way it makes of itself an island - is like filmmaking?

SS:

Perhaps it's just the way I work. I always try to make images spontaneously - but it's hard to hold this feeling after making films for years, it gets more and more difficult. For me film is an island where I put my projections, feeling and longings, they're my world. I make work to be

shown but that's not the first impulse. The first idea is to make islands where I can sit. The point is not to be pedagogical. For instance in *Satourne*, I couldn't make only an analysis of the circular movement. I know structural film, but for me it's over, it's historical. It was an important time, but I use the things I got out of it in a personal, poetic way.

MH:

In structural film there's often a very specific arena, and the film itself is an examination of this arena. *Satourne* shares this quality.

SS:

I use a narrative structure, but without people - or if people are in it they work more as an image than a person. They're equal to the objects that surround them. I never become psychological. The rhythm of the sound and editing are much closer to

something human than the people in it.

MH:

And the physical cinema you spoke of earlier begs an identification with the moving camera. In your early work the camera becomes the protagonist.

SS:

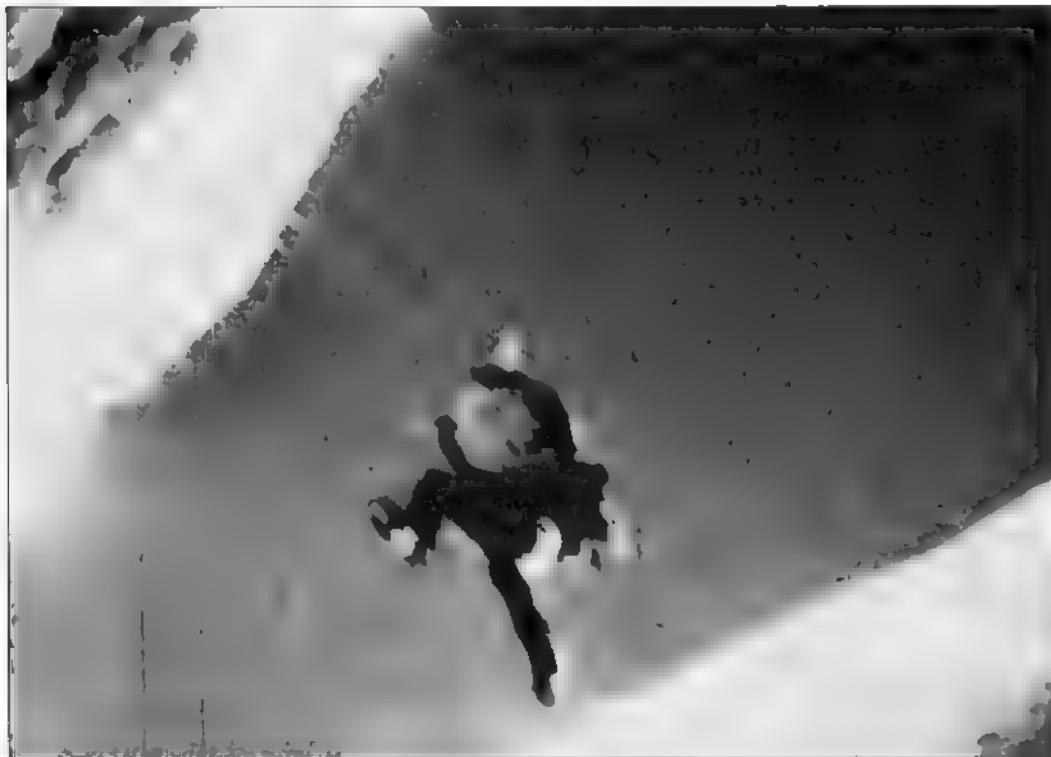
Yes, you identify with the aesthetics, not the person.

MH:

Why is that important?

SS:

I have a great respect for other people. I get closer to what I want to say with the



PARAMOUNT

travel, the h is in brackets, without it you get 'far' in English which means weit. 'Weit' also means far - to go far away. So it goes in both directions.

MH:

What came after *Fa(h)r (weit)*? Was this still the period where you were trying to deal with your super-8 material?

SS:

I was shooting quite regularly so I had a large archive, some of which got into films much later. The next film was *Satourne*, which was made in a park in the Mediterranean area. It's very artificial

fast movement where there are only stills, separated by black leader. It has quite a classical dramatic form.

MH:

When you talk about it it seems quite metaphorical - about relationships.

SS:

One movement seems more structural, the other more poetic. These two levels are always struggling in my films. The film itself is always talking about filmmaking but at the same time it has to have a very poetic surface and a very physical cinema you are taken into not like a

O V E R T H E W A L L

properties of film than acting. Finally, I'm not able to construct a script; I always find things and put them together. I begin with the image. Whenever I applied for a grant and was asked to draft a synopsis for a new project, it always turned out to be a description of the film I was working on! (laughs) I can't pull subjects out of my head, it comes out of life.

MH:

The island film is the next work....

SS:

I worked for more than a year on a circular screen. The screen hung from the ceiling, with a projector mounted inside on a tripod with a motor on it. If the spectator wants to follow the film they have to walk around with it, on the outside of the screen. Movements in the opposite direction of the projector become still, while stills are set into motion. For example, the first film I made for this screen, the simplest one, was a 360 degree horizontal pan in a landscape. But if you project it from inside, leaving the spectator outside, then the circle is erupted, turned inside out. The turning of the camera and the projector are at the same speeds but in opposite directions. So there's no movement, there's only a single scene with a change in light. The moving projector beam scans the landscape. I made several of these. The latest I made showed the inside of the projector apparatus, so finally the installation projects itself, as if the screen were a window.

MH:

Is this an ongoing series?

SS:

Most were loops. When I began to think about the circular movements in Sa-

think.

MH:

What came after that?

SS:

Die Insel is a film made by Jean Francois and I in 1984. '*Die Insel*' is 'the island'. It's a kind of narrative about storytelling. Two men sit in a hotel room taking breakfast in long shot. All the noises of eating are synchronous but not the speaking. One speaks while the other is eating silently. This image stays for a very long time, 3 minutes or so, it gets a little boring. He speaks about his holidays, and the more the story goes on the less the other listens. All in one shot. The next shot shows the two much closer. We began with a long focus shot from far away and end in short focus very close up, so you have nearly the same things in the image compressed at the beginning and separated in the end. After this first scene, the camera moves back into another room, and he's talking all the time, over the whole course of the film's fourteen minutes. Like the images the stories are very banal, unscripted cliché talk about his holidays. When the camera moves into the backroom you don't see them any more, you see chairs, plastic plants, some tables. The camera plays with these objects, but not with very much love, as banal as the story as well. You're always looking for a connection between what he's speaking about and what you see in the room. And then the film finishes. The story gets close to the images, but they never really meet. There's an obvious identification between the silent man and the camera. But like the rest of the film it becomes too much, it's ironic. The whole film has no really interesting images in it. If there

history of other's intentions.

SS:

Sometimes when you look at a sunset you think, 'It's nice, but not as good as a photo.' I like the known images of these postcards, which everyone has experienced. What is represented in the picture is not so interesting, but the way it's taken, the view is important. There's no image which doesn't say anything. That's a contestable point amongst some documentary filmmakers, they believe in the objectivity of their own pictures as opposed to the truth of their view. But the view is always there, before the camera registers it.

MH:

The next film is *Soria Moria Slott*.?

SS:

Yes, Soria is originally a Norwegian tale, the story of a young guy running through the forest to find a girl in a castle and having a lot of adventures. 'Slott' means Schloss - castle - which is far far away and he never reaches it. The first image is two minutes long, and shows a little island far away. There's mist on it, and the sea is in a blue mood, a very Nordic mood. The camera advances very slowly, moving from a boat in the far part of the fjord. Then a small boat crosses the frame, floating away from this movement, like the island far away. Then the island leaves the frame. This is a whole story for me, a film itself with a beginning and an end. At the same time, it could be the beginning of a fiction film. When this part ends, when the boat is almost out of the picture, the film is lightstruck at its end, it grows orange, and cuts directly into the orange of another picture, a woman sitting in a wooden chair reading a story from a

**YOU HAVE THE IMPRESSION OF THINGS MOVING BUT IT'S NOT TRUE,
IT'S YOU MOVING. IN FACT IT'S ONLY CINEMA, ONLY FILM.**

tourne I thought, 'I have to make a circular screen'. The point is that you always stay outside, so when there's a lot of spectators they're all running around the outside of the screen, and it's quite funny to look at. There you see which position the filmmaker takes. He puts people in a dark room, and then sometimes you have to run just to follow the image - this is a dangerous point!

were, it wouldn't work.

MH:

Most filmmakers would find that hard to admit. Sometimes you experience a very moving sunset, and then you take a picture of it, only it looks like a bus station postcard. It's impossible to represent because the very act of representation makes it banal. The camera records only the cliché, only the

book. You never hear the story, you just watch her reading. Her movements are very emphatic and expressive, it's like the way people read for children. This is interrupted by short sequences you can't identify, shot in a very dense blue. The storytelling is orange, and these short bits are accompanied by a very high tone. The storytelling is intercut by these pieces which get longer and longer, and

then a third element is introduced. You see ground moving towards you, in blue-green as well, and then you see the woman turning a page before entering into another materiality. It's printed several times, so it's not really sharp, it lacks detail so she becomes more abstract, more like an image. Meanwhile the movements on the ground are becoming more continuous, swinging back and forth like a wave as she disappears more and more. I just strung a rope up and attached the camera and filmed it backwards. The camera swings over the ground until the end when you see not only the ground but the woods as well. The image freezes and that's the end of the film, which could be the beginning of the film as well. This whole story is about storytelling.

MH:

The woman who's reading is very emphatic in her storytelling. She seems to be telling the story of what happens to the boat on the island, she seems to make up the distance between the boat

another story beginning finally.

MH:

It serves as a counterpoint, because it's an image and sound together.

SS:

The sound that accompanies the storyteller - you don't take it as an accompanying sound because you can't hear her voice. But in the interceding sections sound and image move together, as well as the image where the camera swings.

MH:

It's like a trio then, each has its own sound... It makes them a bit like characters, no matter how abstract the image is they continue to return and progress. But for the most part the film refuses to tell a story. What is the film saying about stories?

SS:

It refuses a certain way of telling stories. The last part in the film is what I like - it's a very physical cinema, the film moves towards that point. I'm laughing as well at a certain kind of storytelling, because this

you know where you are - a standing palm tree in orange with an aura of light around it which changes to blue before moving, intercut later with images of the sea. Water and wind move towards the spectator in a dramatic circular movement, a small hurricane which grows louder as it draws closer. Then it breaks into a movement like flying through green leaves, penetrating a green tunnel, interrupted occasionally by fish appearing silently. Then we return to the images of the wave very large on the screen, but it's cut just before breaking, a little like the motion in *Fa(h)r (weit)*, where you stop breathing when there's images coming. It returns to a long silent passage of sea and jungle, this forward looking movement which gives way to flowers not mixed in with the jungle any more but solo, one species and then another. In this artificial jungle setting they're reminiscent of Rousseau's pictures, with long stamens flowing from the ovaries, they look quite wet, quite obscene. Over these flowers sounds a piece of Bach played by Karajan, very slow and sentimental, much too sentimental. This is the end of the first section.

Then you have the tropical environment but taken in another way, there's no more moving through space, it's very flat, they're really images, they're slowed down, worked on the printer, they're quite still, like wallpaper. In the second part you have drums - because we're in a tropical rainforest and there you have drums, in a very repetitious way (laughs). In the final part of the film we see the sea again in the moonlight, with very heavy music - Bartok although you can't tell - and then a palm tree, you see this three times in alternation, a triple end, and then that's not the end, you have a very decorative fireworks with certain dramatics in it, usually with fireworks you have Baroque music. But this pathetic music makes the fireworks pathetic as well, and that must be the end. The film begins to smile about itself, it can't stop. Satie has a very nice piece like that.

SS:

Dauphin - what does that mean?

SS:

In French it has two meanings - the dolphin, and the successor to the throne. There is a dolphin in the film - for 24 frames, between the first and the second

THE POINT IS THAT YOU ALWAYS STAY OUTSIDE, SO WHEN THERE'S A LOT OF SPECTATORS THEY'RE ALL RUNNING AROUND THE OUTSIDE OF THE SCREEN, AND IT'S QUITE FUNNY TO LOOK AT. THERE YOU SEE WHICH POSITION THE FILMMAKER TAKES. HE PUTS PEOPLE IN A DARK ROOM, AND THEN SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO RUN JUST TO FOLLOW THE IMAGE - THIS IS A DANGEROUS POINT I THINK.

and the island. This is what we expect in a traditional narrative. But her role's undermined here because we can't hear what she's saying, so she becomes a sign for a storyteller instead of the story itself. The brief shots which interrupt her reading look like the tops of trees, photographed to suggest subjectivity, the camera moving, the sound harsh and angst ridden as if someone's confronting something.

SS:

These shots are cued by the most exaggerated of the storyteller's movements. In a way it's a joke, there's

is not really what happens, what really happens is much more unconscious, it's before words, it's something you feel.

MH:

These films are all a year apart, a very regular production. The next film is *Le Dauphin*?

SS:

It's in two parts. It starts very slowly, beginning with a wink, the creation of the image, with the deep sound of the cello, and then a small orange spot that grows. It's a film in itself. When the image is nearly white you see a bit of a palm tree and a bad zoom backwards, and then

O V E R T H E W A L L

part, at this border.

MH:

Le Dauphin seems at least in part to be about the relationship of humans and nature, an uncommon and exotic nature. This relationship between the camera and the Other, this foreignness, seems in the first movement, quite ecstatic. It's a

SS:

Yes. And what you asked before about the surrounding - I've never been to the tropics, but I have images in my mind about it which I like. It's not the nature itself, but the image of the nature, in a certain way I recreate the feeling by the movement. This longing for the exotic

MH:

But the fish seem very much a part of a relation which figures in so much of your work - between water and land. They also function like the punctuation in *Slott* - whose continuous movement is broken by moments of rest, these slow movements contrasting with the rapid movements surrounding them.

The fish are also an image of potential terror and chaos, these flesh-eating piranhas, but now that we've contained them in a little tank, they're beautiful. Their proximity, their domestic trappings, makes them beautiful. After hearing the Bach, which is the most pointed connection in all your work between sound and image, the most didactic...

SS:

I often use sound and image together to create an atmosphere. But there I break it. I make an atmosphere but it's too obvious, so it flows into its opposite. In *Paramount* I use it in the same way.

MH:

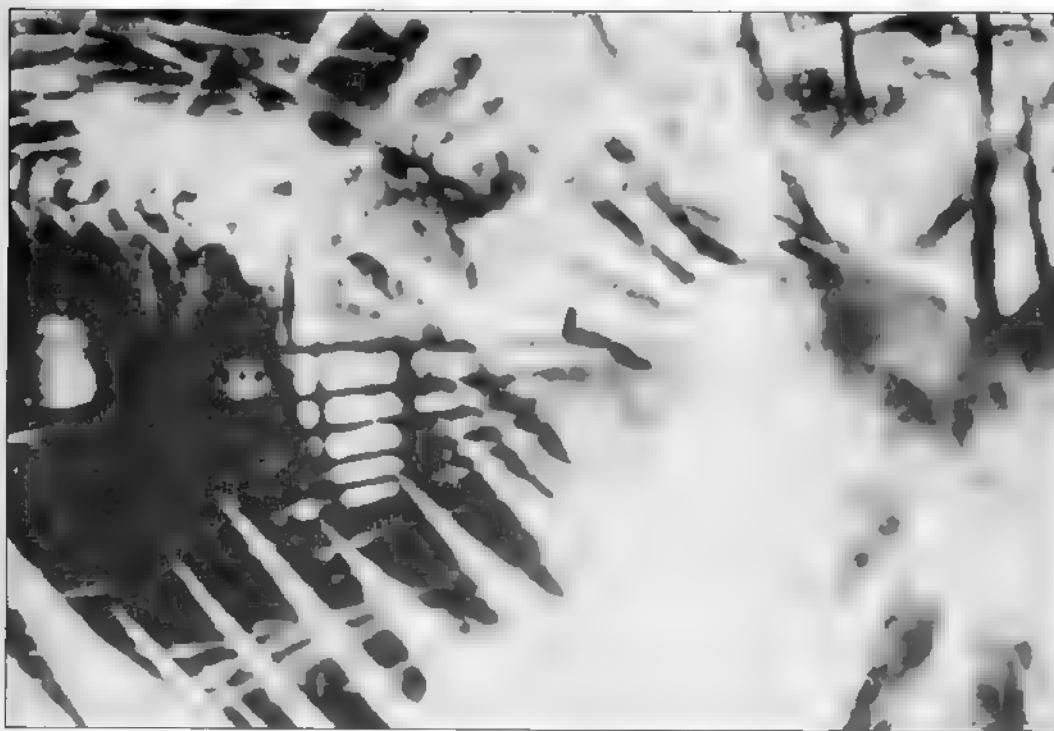
In the section that follows, having already felt this traversal, it moves closer to the plants, and then the stop-motion re-photography. So it begins anew in a way.

SS:

It's like a re-make; it takes another direction. It was always a question: can I go on after these flowers? It feels closed, it could be the end. I didn't want the end there because it would have been too easy. In the second part I work out a certain theme. There's nice pictures as well, but with the drums it gets only to the surface, no deeper. The second part is a variation - it shows where these pictures are coming from: palm trees, blue skies, drums, water by moonlight, these things come together in such a familiar way that they're flat, there's nothing more, they really reduce themselves.

MH:

On the other hand they have a relation to images you see of the south, which is where colonization survives today, in the travel poster. It has nothing to do with



male movement of penetration which is interrupted by these fish and at the end, the flowers. At the end it feels spent, having had its way with nature. It's like you've had an orgasm and then you're limp at the end.

SS:

This picture of the flower brings to a point what the jungle reflects in the preceding sequence. But it's brought too much to a point, it's so much shown that it's not erotic, you laugh about it. If you want, the summit is over, it doesn't go on, especially because I don't show one, but several, I show one flower after another, you begin to count, and this isn't an erotic feeling.

MH:

There's a certain reversal of shape because the movement in the jungle is like an arrow, but photographing the flower the camera withdraws, so it mimics a dramatic curve.

was expressed in colonialism, and again today in our travel pictures. They show a western view of the south, with these strange ideas about an open sexuality. I also have a longing for this exotic, but on the other hand I have to laugh. Most of the tropical pictures have been taken in Germany's greenhouses. I created this other world right here.

MH:

Why the fish? They're contained in an aquarium like the plants are contained in a greenhouse - but you don't show this containment of the plants, with the fish it's very obvious.

SS:

It's a very close situation with an aquarium, as if you're in front of a screen. The wild movements of the first part are like diving, but then you meet these fish and it isn't strange at all, it's quite normal.

LA DAUPHIN

in the section that follows, having already felt this traversal, it moves closer to the plants, and then the stop-motion re-photography. So it begins anew in a way.

SS:

It's like a re-make; it takes another direction. It was always a question: can I go on after these flowers? It feels closed, it could be the end. I didn't want the end there because it would have been too easy. In the second part I work out a certain theme. There's nice pictures as well, but with the drums it gets only to the surface, no deeper. The second part is a variation - it shows where these pictures are coming from: palm trees, blue skies, drums, water by moonlight, these things come together in such a familiar way that they're flat, there's nothing more, they really reduce themselves.

MH:

On the other hand they have a relation to images you see of the south, which is where colonization survives today, in the travel poster. It has nothing to do with

destinations, it's only to do with a certain Northern European imagination, with a will to power. At the same time there's a genuine passion the camera expresses in its lyrical gestures through the foliage.

themes, images and formal strategies of your earlier work. The beginning recalls the *Slott* film - instead of watching a boat moving towards the island we're on a boat - the predominant blue-green color

piece. Then I wondered how to go on, that the part of the hard struggling was missing. I had only romantic nature, Kaspar David Friedrich, but Klaus doesn't fit at all, he's too tall, and he doesn't walk like you'd believe he's walking a lot in nature...

MH:

And at one point he's smoking a cigarette and you hear an airplane overhead.

SS:

I like the cigarette very much. I searched in the archive - a huge pile of all sorts of mountain films. I looked for a harder gesture, for being in the cold regions in these mountains, the fight must be much stronger and more existential. I found them finally in an old film with a group climbing, so I blew up just a small part of the frame, and only the gestures of climbing. From other mountain pictures I took panoramic views that move into the sun - the best one I found was in a recruiting film for the German army. Then I recognized that this male gesture of struggle ...that I couldn't shut my eyes to this part



LE DAUPHIN

This makes for an odd tension between the liberating spirit that moves in a very spontaneous way, but at the same time contains its own analysis.

SS:

Yes, at the beginning the source is always the libido. But I always end up with another view on what I've done, and finally the film ends up with both in it. This thinking on the view is never at the beginning.

MH:

Is this the split between shooting and editing?

SS:

At the beginning the atmosphere of the shooting, its circumstance, is so strong I can't really feel the image. It takes a long time to get rid of this, then I can bring another view to what seems like images made by somebody else, and then I can work with it. You shoot something with a certain intention or fascination, but when you look at it later this has no importance at all. If there's no other view then it has no use.

MH:

In a way *Paramount* replays many of the

figures again as it does in *Fa(h)r (weit)*, *Le Dauphin* and *Satoume*, travel's involved, it mixes super-8 and 16mm, and walks a line between a kind of cliché romanticism and its ironic reflection.

How did the film begin?

SS:

I had some super-8 footage I made without a film in sight, sitting on top of a mountain with a friend, Klaus Telscher. We drank red wine before a vast panorama, under blue skies. I thought it would be a good thing to make a film about this male longing, to struggle with nature and to overcome, to get above it, to get higher. Nearly a year later I met Klaus again. His film class in Bremen was going to Italy and he asked me if I wanted to go with them. That was

another atmosphere, a lot of woods with water running down the mountains. And then I remembered the images of a year ago, and this fit into it. When we began we were upside, and here we were downside, in an idyll that recalled romantic paintings. So I filmed with Klaus there, asking him to act and walk. Later I went to Switzerland, so it came piece by

of German history and film history as well. This all fit strangely together, from the Romantics to the top, where you really get a fascistic aesthetic. At the beginning the film had more to do with masculine behaviour and sexuality. By going into the material I recognized that this had to do with fascism. This behaviour of struggling is only possible without women, with soldiers for example, they're able to do a lot of things only because their sexuality becomes perverse, it grants them energy to fight.

MH:

But it's not obvious in the film that sequences are drawn from an army film. It seems the journey of one man.

SS:

No, no, I didn't want that. But when you see the ice picker the sound is a gunshot. And as well the jumping over the crevasses, you only have one man in the film, but at this top there is a multiplication suddenly, and there's a whole troop jumping, and the music stops. You could see it as a loop, you can't tell it's a whole troop, they're soldiers wearing uniforms. You shouldn't be able to tell them apart

O V E R T H E W A L L

because they express their solidarity in their dress.

MH:

I wonder if the mountain isn't a uniform as well. Can you say something about the German mountain film?

SS:

You always have a hero position, and the body is very important in its struggle against nature, it begins inside it then moves to overcome it. In fascism everything has to be bombastic, inflated, and the mountains are quite good for this. It works very well together. But I didn't want to make a direct line to these films - to take a piece out of Riefenstahl or music by Wagner - it would have been too direct. There's one little bit of Wagner in it, when the avalanche comes down you see a spot, someone is disappearing in the avalanche, and I put in a small piece from Tristan and Isolde, but in an American big band version. It's a joke but it's not so funny. In my film he never reaches the top, as well there is never really this hero person - in order to have

lanche? Is that the revenge?

SS:

Yes, prefigured by the storm and the agitation on top of the mountain. Like a fiction film I begin to introduce the bad end which has already begun. So after all this pathetic struggle and bombastic music and the camera rising into the sun, and the flying eagle - it has to come to a bad end, because the whole thing is drama. At the end he sits again and drinks the wine. Well, that's the Hollywood version, the Paramount version.

MH:

But then it closes again with a bird, that looks like a vulture.

SS:

It's an eagle, but it looks destroyed, because I printed it in reverse. Before when he's flying it's very elegant and majestic, but at the end he's a poor animal shitting. It all has to do with power relations, this climbing, and that became clearer when I saw the context I was working in.

there's two years between them.

MH:

Is it because when you see them finished all you'd hoped to do in film is done?

SS:

I don't know what's still in me to put in another film. I know by now that I have to wait, to live. It's only by living that it comes back, it has to come from somewhere, the strength. You have to get the energy from somewhere.

MH:

You said last night that for you and Klaus it's less possible to be naive about your filmmaking.

SS:

In the beginning I just photographed without ulterior motives. But after making films awhile, you see that there are principles you seem to follow which are not intended, and a style which I don't want to have, but you can't do otherwise because you love certain things and you have to do them. After awhile when you take the camera you think much more about what you're doing, 1000 possible

**AFTER AWHILE WHEN YOU TAKE THE CAMERA YOU THINK MUCH MORE
ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE DOING, 1000 POSSIBLE INTERPRETATIONS ENTER
BEFORE YOU HIT THE TRIGGER. AT THE MOMENT I HAVE TO GIVE MYSELF
A KICK NOT TO THINK TOO MUCH.**

this you need identification and I never really allowed this; you can't.

MH:

One of the odd things about the film is that one person figures so prominently but there's never the sense we're with him. He seems closer to the landscape than we do, but he doesn't seem to be in it, either. Because of the music with the landscape and the idyllic pastoral scenes, it's as if he's read about a certain view of nature and now he's come to look at it, he seems on the edge of the seen. He's always a little outside

SS:

This position of being in, doesn't work, I don't believe in it. But later on in the film, in the found footage, the gesture is much more decided, it gets harder, it's another step up towards the gestures of power, the climb.

MH:

What about the images of the ava-

MH:

You were saying last night that it was really *Le Dauphin* that made you much more of a public filmmaker - this film, *Paramount*, is the first to come after that scrutiny, the success of winning the Oberhausen prize for *Le Dauphin*.

SS:

After *Le Dauphin* I got more involved in the experimental film scene in Germany, where there are power relations. I recognized that the behaviour of some people changed towards me, which I couldn't really understand. That's one of the reasons I was so interested in this theme, the question of power and of a certain macho behaviour which goes along with it. After *Le Dauphin* it was very difficult to begin something else, because it was the most complex film I'd done. There was a big hole afterwards, I felt like I could never do a film again. It took quite a while to begin the next film -

interpretations enter before you hit the trigger. At the moment I have to give myself a kick not to think too much. It's hard, because you know the difficulties that come later when things don't fit; you're already editing before you shoot.

STEPHAN SACHS FILMOGRAPHY

- Duell 10 min s8 1980
- La Plage 8 min s8 1981
- Verelsung 20 min b/w 1982
- Lauf 7 min 7 min 1982
- Fa(h)r (welt) 8 min 1983
- Satourne 8 min 1983
- Die Insel 14 min 1984 (with J.F. Guiton)
- Filme zur Rundprojektion Wanderinges Filmbild 1984
- Sorla Morla Slott 7 min 1985
- Le Dauphin 22 min 1986
- Paramount 22 min 1988

G

E

R

M

A

N

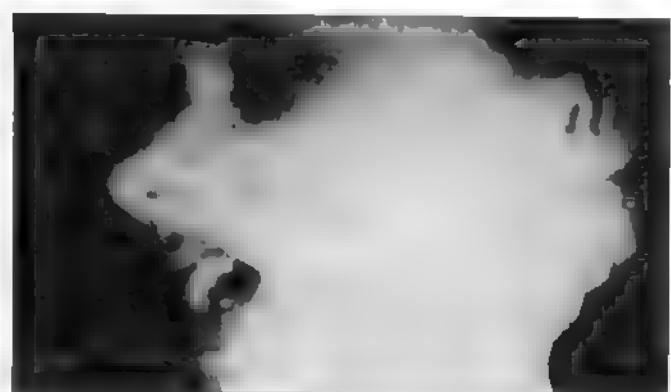
Y

LATE SUMMER

OK



THAT'S



ENOUGH



an interview with KLAUS TELSCHER

KLAUS TELSCHER is a 35 year old filmmaker who began work in the late '70s. From 1976-1979 he studied art at the School of Art and Music in Bremen; a year later he began teaching film there. His students have included Claudia Schillinger, a German filmmaker who began work in his class and who has recently moved to Berlin (see "I'm Not Against Pornography: An Interview with Claudia Schillinger") It was this same film class that made a trip to Italy accompanied by Stephan Sachs where some of the footage for Sach's *PARAMOUNT*, featuring Telscher himself, was photographed. Working with an extreme economy of means, Telscher does all of his own film processing, giving his work a flickering, hand-made quality that overlays the scarred surface of development with the image behind it. Extraordinarily personal and deeply felt, his films convey a deep intellectual passion without recourse to the word, and are largely self financed.

O V E R T H E W A L L



MH:
How did you get interested in making films?

KT:
I started filmmaking in 1977. I was studying painting at an art school in Germany when I came into contact with some American experimental films and I was very interested. The public didn't like them at all, but I liked them so I tried to get an approach to this filmmaking, find out how to do these films.

MH:
Was it part of the curriculum of the school?

KT:
No, I saw them somewhere in Hanover, somebody was touring with a package of films.

MH:
Then you started making super-8?

KT:
I started with 16mm, trying to find out something about structural filmmaking, but this was already at the end of the structural film period.

MH:
Do you remember what you saw?

KT:
It was a film by Michael Snow, *Back and Forth*. We had a film

department in that school where nothing happened. There was a professor but he didn't teach filmmaking.

MH:
Were you able to use the equipment at school?

KT:
We had a camera but I had no money, so I bought some black and white film stock, and I started to develop it by myself. I felt this way of working had more possibilities than giving it to a lab.

MH:
Were the earlier films you made at the school structural films?

KT:
Yeah.

MH:
Was there was a plan you would make before starting?

KT:
Absolutely. My early films were technically oriented. My experience with traveling mattes and superimpositions and all these kind of things were done at that time.

MH:
Can you give an example?

KT:
I did some structural films that I think are not that good. My filmmaking changed when I realized that structural film came to an end. There was no need to go on. I think many structural films didn't work with the audience. What I tried to do was use the language of structural films and work for the audience with a content that comes from outside, just like *Late Summer* for example, which is like structural film in that it uses long shots and a single camera position throughout. But I try to use structural film language with something that comes out of me behind it. It's like poetic film narration with structural

film language.

MH:
When I talked with Schmelz dahin they said, 'We've made a lot of films, but *Stadt im Flammen* was really the beginning of our public life, our first film.' Is there a such film for you?

KT:
Yes, *Pieces of Development*. It's the first film I consider my own. When you make a film you try to create your view, your own vision of the world. I bought a camera, and I didn't know whether it worked or not. So one afternoon I went into the garden with three of my friends. They sat while I shot, and I developed the film and it looked quite different than what I'd done before. That was the beginning.

MH:
What is the film about?

KT:
It's about the view, the camera perspective. For example, in one sequence, three people are sitting in chairs, and the position of the camera is such that they are sitting on a diagonal for about two minutes and then the camera tilts to the other side and they clap. And then they see that it's wrong again - they see that the camera is again tilted and they're very irritated. And then it returns to the horizontal and they clap again. You see the audience when you see the film. That was 1979. There's another sequence: a woman sits at a table and everything is tilted though you can't tell until she stands up in the end. It's black and white and self-developed.

MH:
Do you develop all of your films?

KT:
Most of the time.

MH:
Was this film made in Art School?

KT:
No, just after, in Bremen.

MH:
Was there a filmmaking scene?

KT:
No, we were three people starting experimental film so we had to invent everything on our own.

MH:
The other two are—?

KT:
Diminished.

MH:
Did you get any kind of public feedback apart from this circle?

KT:
No. Later on I had the chance to show my films to Birgit Hein. I knew she was an experimental filmmaker, and she liked them, so I came into contact with a whole scene of experimental film in 1979-80.

MH:
Did that change your work?

KT:
No. But I realized when I showed my films they were different from other structural filmmaking. There were books on this kind of filmmaking and most people working in structural film made films following the descriptions like a recipe. This is why I didn't like structural filmmaking in the end.

MH:
What came after *Pieces of Development*?

KT:
I don't really like to talk about my films.

MH:
In *Pieces of Development* you talked about the way the camera sees, and this also seems important in *Late Summer*. Is this a consistent theme?

KT:
I try to do personal films, but I go further, to find some general aspect in my personal view. When you're a filmmaker you start in a very

strong way and look happily at the world, and you think you can change the world, change filmmaking. But the more you work the more you become resigned, and the happy view changes to its opposite. I got tired from filmmaking and my last two films look a little burned out. They are about getting older, about how life is fading away. This is what you will see if you watch all of my films: you see how a person gets older.

ME

Have you noticed a difference in the ways audiences react over ten years?



Left: Klaus Tuscher; Above: ON THE BALANCE



KT:

I think my films are more difficult now. The more easy the films look, the more complicated they are. When I started my films I began with a very complicated technique, superimpositions, etc. and this is what audiences like, complicated images which in fact are very easy. Complicated technique is very easy. The simpler an image looks the more complicated it is. I think the problem with my later films like *Late Summer* or *On The Balance* is that you have to be in a special kind of mood to understand them. These are not festival films, for example.

ME

A setting like that makes a lot of films invisible, even though

they show up on the screen. It's a problem making short films, because no one comes to a theatre to watch a five minute film. You always need a program, and these programs can't distribute an undivided attention. Are festivals how most people show their work here?

KT:

Yes, but for my work it's a problem, perhaps after all it's a question of history, of what can be seen and how it's shown. Brakhage, for instance, is not as good as his reputation, but he's shown everywhere. What happened in our history is that people like David Larcher who are very good are unwritten because of his talent. For example when Kubelka went

to New York he never mentioned people like Kurt Kren. So I don't think it's a good idea to show these classics over and over again because if you do, you don't allow different things to happen. Experimental film is quite different now from those days, I think you have to concentrate on new people and show them.

ME

What tends to happen - and I saw it very much at the Experimental Film Congress - is that certain works in North America are shown over and over again, and the writing follows. These are the reference points, the base, and everything else comes after and is understood in that light. Without a centralized distribution service in Europe, this condition of showing a canon of work country-wide, is unthinkable. But in North America a lot of writing centres around films in the canon because they're the most accessible. If you want to write you need the films available, and there they are - the greatest hits. It becomes a recipe for what the students are expected to produce.

KT:

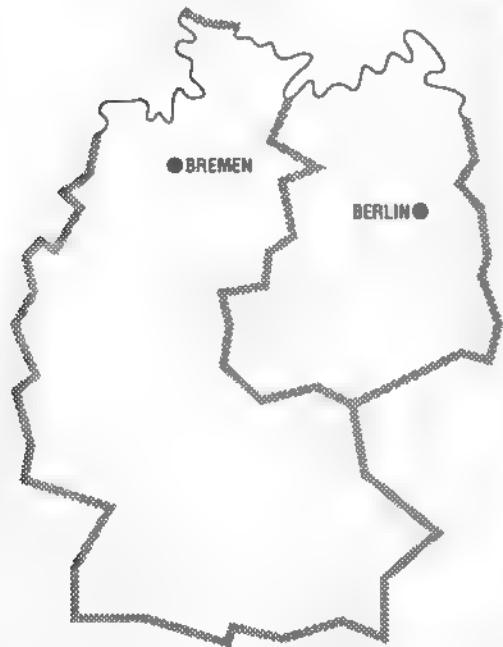
This is what I did. I made some terrible mistakes. You know that I've taught experimental film for some time. Sometimes I talked so much about my point of view in class that the films the students made looked like mine. Now I feel it's better to be very careful when you're teaching. Okay, now we must finish the interview. I can't speak English this morning. Wir müssen. That's it.

KLAUS TELSCHER FILMOGRAPHY

- 1978: *A Hollywood Flashback; Light and Window; Unter den Linden*
- 1979: *Snowfields; ZDF; Black in Progress*
- 1980: *Entwicklungsstücke*
- 1981: *Alexanderschnee*
- 1982: *Eastmans Reisen; Filme von Gestern; American Hotel*
- 1983: *Euer Herz dem Tier*
- 1984: *Aus der alten Welt*
- 1985: *Great Kendo Commercial*
- 1986: *Am See; Gewalt und Leidenschaft*
- 1987: *Nachsommer; Warum ist es am Rhein so schon*
- 1988/89: *On the Balance*

O V E R T H E W A L L

I'M NOT AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY



BETWEEN

an interview with CLAUDIA SCHILLINGER

CLAUDIA SCHILLINGER is a thirty-one year old filmmaker originally hailing from Bremen. She studied in Bremen's School of Art and Music with Klaus Telscher for four years before deciding to move to Berlin. She has made four films and two video installations since 1985. Her work is deeply concerned with sex, power and gender relations and has moved from a material filmwork (film as film) to an issue-oriented politic conveyed in images, not words. This shift reflects in microcosm a general tendency in German experimental filmwork from 'purely' formal concerns, expressed in an eroticization of the film surface, to an examination of eroticism itself.

G E R M A N Y

MH:

You came to Berlin just seven months ago. Is Berlin important for your work?

CS:

Bremen is really a provincial town. I made film in Bremen for four years, studying with Klaus Telscher and I wanted to extend my boundaries. Very quickly you come to know all there is in Bremen, not a lot happens (laughs). I'm happy in Berlin because there's so many no-budget and super-8 filmmakers. Berlin is very fresh.

MH

Where do you meet these filmmakers - in the bars, the cinemas?

CS:

It's more at festivals - I knew all these names from Bremen

but never met them until I came - Steff Ulbrich, Michael Brynntrup, Alte Kinder, and so on.

MH

Do you think there's some reason why the no-budget filmmaking scene should happen more in Berlin?

CS:

Berlin has an underground scene in music, theatre, film, art.

MH

When I was speaking with Steff Ulbrich, he talked about a super-8 ghetto that existed here in Berlin. He said that a lot of people used to work in super-8, that it was fashionable for a time, but not so much any more. He has the feeling that if you continue to make super-8 films you can

reach only other filmmakers, never a real audience. Do you think that's true?

CS:

No, I don't think so. In Berlin the people are more open to underground films or super-8 low-budget films. If you do it in little towns in Germany it's impossible. The atmosphere here is conducive to working. You have more communication about your own films, you meet a lot of people talking about the films you've seen and so on.

MH

When people are making work do they reach each other and say, 'Do you wanna have a look at my work-in-progress?' Does that happen much?

CS:

I would call Michael Brynntrup

perhaps or Steff. When I'm cutting a new film I need people to tell me what's it about. So it does happen here.

MH

Does that mean there's not so much a feeling of competition here amongst filmmakers? Can you talk amongst each other because you're not fighting over screenings, money or attention?

CS:

It's not a strong competition. It's an open competition, so it's possible to talk about the films in spite of this competition.

MH

Can you say how you got interested in making films?

CS:

First I studied graphics and I



BETWEEN

O V E R T H E W A L L

DAN WHITRE WITH EMER FRAN



took a lot of photographs looking for my personal outlook/expression. I visited the film class in Bremen just for fun, and ended up staying. Klaus Telscher was teaching. I came to film by accident.

■■■

This was in an art school.

CS:

Yes. That's where I started with film.

MH:

Can you describe them?

CS:

They show different views on women's sexuality. In the beginning I worked a lot with film materials, the grain.

MH:

How did you do that?

CS:

Printing from TV, from video to super-8 film, then back to TV, to 16mm and so on, creating patterns through the generations of film. I used to be very interested in these pictures, but today it's not so important to work with the material. The first film I made showed stills of women's positions in art and prostitution, mixing them together.

The second film was more romantic, it was double exposed, a black woman and a white woman, always me with black clothes and white clothes. It was about sexuality and identity. The white woman danced while the other stood still. Their movements would overlap. Sometimes I developed black and white film myself like Klaus Telscher, but now I go to the lab.

■■■

So this film is a dance film but also like a trance film in a way - like a personal psychodrama, trying to bring together, to integrate these two parts, like Maija Lene-Rettig's *L'Appasia*.

CS:

Or *L'Appasia* is a bit like this film. My new film *between* is a concrete attempt to show sexual fantasy and to find special film forms for these fantasies.

MH: Why is it important to find a special form?

CS:

You know about pornos - they have a special form. I think it's not the form I feel. I was

looking for moments of passion. For me the film brings together many moments of passion, there is no realistic surrounding.

■■■

So the film moves away from continuity. The experiences are isolated and demand that the viewer put them together. Why this interest in the fragment?

CS:

Perhaps it's a bit like a puzzle. You take an ass, and breasts and cunt, and dildo and you combine them as you want. The fascination for me is not to say here's female sex and here's male sex - male sex is active and female is passive. I have a fascination with these fragments and to combine them into new forms.

MH:

You mean that sex exists not in one place or the other but somewhere in between.

CS:

Yes, *between* is the title of the film.

■■■

Did you start with an image?

CS:

I had an image with breasts and dildo and began to work around it. I started to dance with this dildo, and saw that I moved differently. This was the beginning.

There are two women in *between* - one lies in a bed and fantasizes, while the other woman stands and brushes her hair, looking into the camera. They're in two different places. Between these two women there's a lot of pictures without heads or legs, pictures with dildo, cunts. Later on the dreamer stands by a tree and masturbates. I intercut pictures of cunts and the dildo. (pause)

MH:

Don't leave our readers in suspense, tell us how it ends.

CS:

In the end she's sitting on a toilet and you hear the water coming down into the toilet, she's leaves singing, and this is the end. But it's very difficult to describe a film in this way I think. It's ten minutes long.

■■■

Of the two women one seems quite passive and one active. While it's possible to view the film in a number of ways, *between* seems the fantasy of one woman pictured in various 'between' states - on a toilet, sleeping. She's the figure to which the film returns after the montaged clusters intercede, she makes a centre for the film. Both the way that it's cut and the way sex is shown is quite aggressive. Do you think that's right?

CS:

For me it's right but many people tell me it's not aggressive, it's a soft picture. I think it's a kind of sexual feeling to increase the feeling until it's painful. I wanted to show it.

■■■

Is that because there's no feeling without that pain?

HAN WALTER WILHELM HIRSHBERG

**CS:**

No. It has to do with fantasies, female sexual fantasies. They have to do with painful moments, the sacrifice attitude of women and using these stronger images is a way to overturn that but also to show passivity. Women's sexual fantasies show a lot of sacrifice attitudes, I think it's a kind of death feeling. For women it's forbidden to have sexual feelings so they imagine situations where they are forced to sexuality. It's not only a feeling of death but a fascination with aggressiveness or brutality.

MH:

These feelings of passivity? You feel there's also a fascination with the opposite or to bring on the opposite?

CS:

Yes.

MH:

Do you think sex always has to do with power?

CS:

Yes. For me sex has two faces, the first in the head, imagination and fantasy, and the other is the real feeling on the skin. This film, *between*, is more in the direction of imagination. It tries to find some pictures which are sexually stimulating, which are my pictures. It's an aim for me to find a form which has two parts - skin feeling and

imagination.**MH:**

When you said before that in your earlier work you were more interested in working with the material this seems related to the skin. Do you think there's been a move from the skin to the head?

CS:

Yes. The skin is the classic female view on sexuality. When you see some films from women on female sexuality there's often cloth and roses. For me it was interesting to find another view, an aggressive view. Because if you stay on this point, with this skin feeling, you cannot come to an active sexuality.

■■■

The kind of films you're describing are quite symbolic, always abstract, whereas your film is quite direct, physical. It shows cunt, hand, dildo, it's very explicit. But there's a growing group in the German women's movement who might feel these images are pornographic because pornography is always against women, always sexist. Their equation insists that its very explicitness makes it degrading.

CS:

I'm not against pornography. I think it's important for women to get a feeling for the speech

of sexuality, and also the language of pornography which is a male language. Women ask, 'How can I speak sexually, how can I film sexually?' You can't pass the male expression, you have to go through it. That's my position. If you go through there are strange moments when you don't

know what you are - are you female or are you too male? But it's important to go through. It's a kind of appropriation to use male expressions, a female appropriation that's important. You have to feel your own aggressiveness, it's important to feel it.

MH:

There's a few films that play in theatres around the world. But the kind of films you make play in small houses, with small audiences. Because your point is a political one - about taking over an area that has long been a male preserve - doesn't making an experimental film marginalize what you're trying to do? Doesn't this reinforce the already marginalized expression of women?

CS:

It's a new female language - not just my film, a lot of filmmaking. If you go to commercial cinema and you make commercial films, you cannot use a new language, you have to make a lot of compromises, and that's not the way, you make a lot of lies.

MH:

The feature film industry has been very much dominated by men. The history of this form is largely male. Do you think that adopting this form and putting new ideas into it

shows an acceptance of traditional male discourse? Or is a woman's cinema always speaking from the margins, the outside?

CS:

If you have a new theme or object you must have a new form because they're together: form and content.

■■■

But for most people they're not together. Many people don't understand these films and don't want to go see them because the form is different - so what about those people?

CS:

I don't care about all the people.

■■■

When I was speaking with Staff he said that most of the experimental filmmakers whose work was important in some way, who were seriously making work, had a common theme of sexuality, and that this would likely be the case for another ten years or so. Do you think that's true and why? (pause) Now you can tell everyone how sexy Berlin is.

CS:

Berlin is very sexy. For me sexuality contains all existential problems, they are in sexuality and they take an extreme form and that's the point. You understand? Perhaps because there's a lot of extreme forms of sexuality in Berlin, you find a lot of different perverse people.

■■■

Most of whom are also making films. (all laugh)

CS:

Berlin is the town in Germany where many young people come and try to find new forms of living. The German squatter movement started from Berlin, about 140 houses at the turn of the decade, and all of the squatters wanted to find a new way to live which should be communal, to live

O V E R T H E W A L L

together, to sleep together. And this kind of filmmaking is a part of that life.

A lot of sexual films function only because sexuality is forbidden. I think my film would not function if people were free in their own sexuality. A lot of people go to cinema to see sexual films, there's always a big audience. The more hardcore the better, in Berlin especially. They are always disappointed, though.

MH:

And how does your film function in that economy?

CS:

I don't know. People are very quiet when it comes on. And in the last scene in the toilet they start to drink again.

MH:

Do you think your film could show in a porno theatre? Is that something you'd be interested in trying?

CS:

If a porno theatre decides to show this film, okay. In commercial pornos they want to have women behind the cameras, they're looking for women to make porno films and develop a new market.

MH:

Does your film fit into that?

CS:

I don't think so. It's a little too abstract. In commercial pornos you see a story. I just don't know whether it would work. I think my film has a lot of distance to the audience, the way one woman comes to the camera and looks into it, it's a picture of distance. The film doesn't really want to stimulate the audience. My film is about fantasy, about the expression of a language which shows my fantasy, and this is the opposite of porno. Porno has no fantasy, it just shows the simple act, and the people who go there don't have enough fantasy to see it for themselves. So they go to the theatre to see the pure act

which has nothing to do with my fantasies. In *between* you see the dildo and the cunts but always in short cuts, minimal pictures, which is different from a porno. The audience doesn't need fantasy at all. In my film you can recognize a part of your own fantasies, it's not showing you in such a direct way that it kills your own.

MH:

Are you working on a new film?

CS:

Yes, I'm writing a script. It's about sexual moments in childhood. In Germany there's two discussions about sexuality - shall we forbid pornos, we women, and the other discussion is about child abuse. And the moral is the same. I want to try in the new film not to show sexual abuse, but to imagine it as the fantasy of a child.

MH:

So instead of starting with an image, you start with an idea, a script and words. Will there be actors?

CS:

Yes. I want to get money from the Film Bureau in Hamburg perhaps and to work with real actors for the first time.

MH:

How much did the *between* film cost?

CS:

For only the materials including three prints: \$2000. For the rest of my films between \$700 - \$1500 - I never pay actors, myself, the equipment. I own my own editing table. I get the equipment from the art schools in Braunschweig or Bremen.

MH:

Will the new film be longer?

CS:

Perhaps 30-40 minutes. It will be more like a fiction film.

MH:

The old German experimental

film didn't have so much to do with stories. It worked a lot more with materials like your early films. This change seems very marked in Germany; many people have talked about this shift from 'film as film' to a time now where stories are increasingly important. Why is this change important for you?

CS:

Perhaps it's not correct to make a distinction between material films and story films. Before they were all personal films.

Birgit Hein made a structural film that was a personal film and it told a story, *Roh Film*. Every good structural film tells something of a filmmaker and his/her view on the world. The point we come from is the same. It's always a personal interest in film and film form

as a subject. I think the script is like a fiction film and later on I'll work with the printer and make an experimental structure for it. I can get deeper with experimental structures and wider with fiction. After working with the film's material, its chemical make-up, I became more interested in cutting, and finally this montage broke me loose from the material.

MH:

Are you more interested in issues, the social aspect of the film, as opposed to the film in itself?

CS:

My films were always personal. The first films were more romantic and that's marked a change in my thinking. What was important was the feeling, the warm feeling. Now it's more a cool feeling. I think I've changed

the distance from my own feelings, my own pictures. I also have much more distance to the social pictures that surround me, that are around all of us. I worked a lot to destroy these social pictures, showing the generations of change. I wanted to show what they were made of, making them bigger and bigger until there's only the grain pulsing. Now I have more distance to these social



DAS WAHRE WESEN EINER FRAU

pictures. I don't want to work with them, I want to find new individual pictures, to build something instead of taking something away.

CLAUDIA SCHILLINGER FILMOGRAPHY

1985 *FATALE FEMME*

(11 min.)

1986 *DREAMS OF A VIRGIN*

(14 min.)

1987 *DAS WAHRE WESEN*

EINER FRAU (13 min.)

1988 *ZENTRAL-BAD*,

2 screen VHS (23 min.)

1988 *DROP OUT*, Video

installation with H. Flint

1989 *BETWEEN* (9 min.)

Thomas Lauks, Matthias Müller, Maija Lene Rettig of ALTE KINDER



WEEKS IN EUROPE

by OWEN O'TOOLE

OWEN O'TOOLE is an American filmmaker hailing from Maine who is responsible for organizing a project entitled 'The Filmmakers Almanac'. Loosely based on Hollis Frampton's *Magellan* cycle, a mammoth cycle of films which would run daily over the course of a year, O'Toole invited filmmakers from around the world to choose a day of their own interest and make a short super-8 film around it. Response from different countries has varied, but Germany has been particularly enthusiastic in its participation, especially the *Alte Kinder* group - a four-member distribution collective consisting of Christiane Heuwinkel, Matthias Müller, Maija-Lene Rettig and Thomas Lauks. Each has made a film for the Almanac and their correspondence led to further cross-Atlantic collaboration on a three-screen film entitled *The Flamethrowers*. O'Toole hosts a weird radio show in Maine, carries on a vociferous mail art campaign and is an enthusiastic 'promoter' of super-8.

O V E R T H E W A L L

WE FLEW TO LUXEMBOURG IN SEPTEMBER TO VISIT AND WORK WITH MEMBERS OF THE ALTE KINDER FILM GROUP IN BIELEFELD, GERMANY. A new film project, *The Flamethrowers*, required close contact with Alte Kinder, and we also wanted to find locations to show the Filmers Almanac there next fall, so our time there was spent with some obsession for these film projects. With the Almanac we have invited (m)any filmmakers to shoot super-8 for a day in '88. The resulting calendar film will be presented through the year(s) as a tour guide to super-8 styles. German filmmakers have been very enthusiastic for the Almanac. There are echoes of a super-8 boom in that country. AGFA film is cheap and includes processing, so film roars through the camera(s).

The Flamethrowers develops the open-invitation method of the Almanac into a more focused and chosen collaboration. We sent three rolls of footage to Alte Kinder and invited them to put their associations on film. The resulting six reels were shown at the Intercom media festival in Bielefeld. We used three projectors to create a film-mural or triptych. First the S'pool rolls side-by-side and then the Alte Kinder reels, a dual triptych. We went into the city's underground walkways one night to make resounding noise(s) for the soundtrack. Alte Kinder used measuring tape (a la Kubelka) to design synchronous edits for their 3-screen section. It was amazing to work with these four persons as a group. Alte Kinder is now reduced to a group of four filmmakers (from 8). Alte Kinder produce very sophisticated films, films which test the limitation of the super-8 gauge, films which comment fiercely on history and moving pictures yet also present personal images as only the super-8 camera can (be part of one's life like a sketchbook). Strong personal films take form thanks to the feedback and participation of close friends as collaborators. Nearly all the Alte Kinder films are group projects, if not in the image collecting and editing, especially in their uses of soundtrack. (The family four-track cassette recorder works as hard as any camera.) Matthias Müller, Christiane Heuwinkel, Thomas Lauks and Maija-Lene Rettig have each developed a unique style and film fluency. It was invaluable to discuss with them the situation of finding oneself (still standing) as a young vocal filmmaker, and how we must both accept and reject this role. While in Bielefeld, we were shown Almanac films nearing completion by Matthias and Maija.

MY REVIEWS:

JUNE 10 (Matthias Müller). A forage of long jungle leaves. Eyes squint as if bursting (over-ripe) in sight. Black and white footage was 'pressed with blossoms' for an organic dyeing and then refilmed through veined paper to further texture the leaves of the film. His soundtrack is like stepping upon dead leaves (fallen). This contrast of living image and dead sound creates an amazing and ironic total picture and portrays something inherent to all photochemical processes: the deadness of pictures and the living matter they (must try to) represent.

FEB 24 (Maija-Lene Rettig). Stravinsky's *Rite(s) of Spring* fills the soundstripe on this home movie/travel film. Crystal chandelier, then water rushing and shots on a ferry crossing to Poland evoke things past, the yesterdays of Europe still to be seen in the East. Maija's musical cutting sews together strips of time from East and West.

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST (Christiane Heuwinkel and Matthias Müller) is the most accomplished super-8 film I've ever seen, its stylized use of still photos and video-scan creating a new type of flicker-film: a haunting recollection of Hitchcock's showerhead and Bertolucci's Venetian blinds. A hypnotizing image pulse evokes the alienation of cold war Europe as seen through the morning routine/ritual of a young couple. *Epilog*, Heuwinkel and Müller's more recent co-creation, goes further toward abstraction in its depiction of childhood imagination. The film is thick with recycling, re-filming projections until forms lose definition and singularity as through the cataracts of memory or the child's mind when eyes are closed (the childlike wisdom of blindness), before society fits its 'focus', before the child is ready (or not) to shout 'here I come'. *Epilog* is an abundance of images; a murky history pours from screen and speaker(s) and our senses grab these fragments and paste them down into a collage of more-or-less (many) meaning(s). A game of hide-and-go-seek. The shadow of the filer follows feet stepping at the top of screen, a brilliant depiction of one body torn into two by the film (like a sliding frame); our body is but a shadow searching out a true set of shoes. The screen multiplies and divides into three frames within the frame, and the sound (!): Dirk Schafer's track follows each complex change in the film's form with absolute care. *Epilog* becomes a decaying symphony, an astounding cohesion of collage in this 16 minute film. Footage (de)generates as it is refilmed; an entire drama of composition lies within the DEcomposing material awaiting to be exhumed by the thoughtful microphone, the patient camera. Spontaneous combustion might be an appropriate term for this film-practise, and yes, we see the film burn and bubble over, an exhaustive vocabulary of film methods igniting the screen. We would expect such advanced use of film to surface only in 16mm, and in this country that is more or less the case. Institutions, insecure in investment, offer students a future (!) in professional filmmaking or video in collaboration with the corporations who market today's disposable cameras. And the distances between city-centres in the United States isolates us each into our small world (after all). In Europe you have the trains; and in Germany you have a special history which drives young people together to ask questions and demand their history. They demand to be told everything, which makes them very OLD CHILDREN.

WE VISITED THOMAS LAUKS' APARTMENT TO SEE HIS SUPER-8 OPTICAL PRINTER MADE WITH BOLEX PROJECTOR AND BAUER CAMERA

TURNED IN ON EACH OTHER. Lauks is the technical wizard of Alte Kinder. He and Matthias are now doing their own film processing (spaghetti style) with beautiful results. Experimentation is a matter of economy: how to make the most of the least.

First Class Hotel. We traveled with Maija and Matthias to the Braunschweig Hochschule für Bildende Kunste (Art School) to sit in on a film class they attend with Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. The Heins are rather famous for producing a large body of experimental films in the '60s and '70s and for founding the X-screen film collective in Cologne. Alf Bold was scheduled to appear with a program of films entitled 'Sexual Relations', but he forgot or something, so the evening screening turned into a relaxed kind of party. Over several wines, Wilhelm explained that the film artist must learn to demand the treatment usually reserved for famous painters when traveling. First Class Hotels.

1988 was the 100th anniversary of director F.W. Murnau's birth in Bielefeld, so a rather fancy symposium and retrospective graced the town as we prepared to return to the States. The symposium included an award presentation to Murnau scholar Eric Rohmer, an infernal video screening with Dr. Vera Body (canceled), and a screening of films by Alte Kinder (including the *Flamethrowers!*)

One of our final nights in Bielefeld, Maija-Lene Rettig privileged us to a screening of raw material for her new film-in-progress (and first in 16mm) titled *The Hanged One*. We also saw her last two films: *The Invisible Pictures*, which she refused to show publicly for some reason and *Der Kleine Tod*, made with her friend and lover Bernd Boehm. Bernd does the sound work on Maija's films. Maija doesn't like *The Invisible Pictures*, she says, because it doesn't hold together. There are three sections in the film, contrasting a time-lapse or 'structuralist' photography with romantic music and imagery, and these resolve (?) into a humorous Dr. Zhivago section which perhaps explains the battle of formalism and romanticism as relating to some Russian influence or interest. There is a wonderful sequence of boots marching up and down steps to the sound of a rattling drum. *Der Kleine Tod* is one of the strongest super-8 films to come out of Bielefeld. The film has a 'professional' 16mm-like quality. The images are clear and rich in color, and the sound works beside all its images. We see and hear electrical storms of the body, metaphors for sexuality and the spirit which animates the flesh. Maija and Bernd try to go beyond their relationship to find pieces of the puzzle in magnetism.

TAKE COURAGE and **RED ROSES**, two films by Maija-Lene Rettig, show another side of Alte Kinder: the quasi-documentary diary-film. *Take Courage*, a record of Rettig's stay in London, reminds one of the many 'symphony of a city' films, but then she turns the camera back on herself and we see the filer in relation to all the city's commotion. A moving meditation on aloneness amidst the multitudes and the search for familiar signs,

Red Roses uses the same direct diary style to present images of a woman's menstrual period and uncover meaning(s) in this blood. Rettig treats this visually secretive subject with a mundane sanctity; the ritual bath, the contemplation of snapshots and the symbolic rose evoke an innocent and curious humanity, whose greatest confusions and solutions stir within: the body.

In the material for **THE HANGED ONE**, we saw something like a filmed performance. The actress smears gray ash all over her very white body. As in Rettig's earlier *Red Roses*, we witness a woman's ritual of transformation, only she has changed direction to some extent. In *Red Roses*, the character searches into herself for answers or meditation. The ashes of *The Hanged One* represents a reaching out into the world of matter and the attempt to breathe new life into our contact with 'things'. This may reflect the decision to move up to 16mm equipment. The new equipment is awkward and heavy compared to the super-8 hand. The shots were perhaps stiff or stagy, but this plays into Rettig's hand(s). She has a musical knack for cutting. She is one of these filmmakers to whom filming means little and editing is all.

BACK IN MID-SEPTEMBER, JONATHAN POLLARD OF TORONTO WAS ALSO A GUEST OF ALTE KINDER; HE BROUGHT A PROGRAM OF SUPER-8 FILMS FROM CANADA TO SHOW IN VARIOUS GERMAN CITIES. Many of these films come out of a gay and lesbian subculture with links also to punk fanzine and xerox publishing. Films like *Phallocrasse* or *Masturbation* depict a brazen sexuality bursting out of leather and into film. John Porter's super-8 shorts reveal a life's work of social and nature studies. The time-lapse camera examines the flood of students into a gymnasium of desks, their fidgeting, the racing test-books pages and then departure in a film called *Exams*. Or we might watch the migration of cars at a drive-in theatre in his fabulous *Drive-In*. And Porter's satirical side emerges as he scratches and paints on top of a sound stage-show performance of *Calendar Girl*, '50s style. Evidently, this man has produced hundreds of these little masterpieces and is a type of 'mentor' for the Toronto super-8 underground.

In October, the steeped town of Munster played host for the Filmzwergen (Film Dwarves) festival, a showcase of recent independent German super-8 and 16mm productions. We arrived to see the Uli Versum retrospective as presented by Uli's half-brother Zeno, who operates Fazit Films distribution. Uli Versum has become a minor superstar. His last film, *The Fantastic Doll's House*, is one of the best short films of recent years in any category. 'Mother's children lived in a fantastic doll house'. Mother has a radiant Tycho Brahe nose in the puppet film for living actors. The children live in a throbbing, hypnotized state within the doll house while halos envelop their features (were they born from the Mother's nose full-grown at a sneeze?) Uli plays both puppet and puppeteer in this haunted children's theatre.

O V E R T H E W I L L

The duel of personalities between Uli and Zeno was evident in a long videotape of the two in a talk-show setting. Uli displays a soft narcissism, product of his gift for acting, while Zeno expresses an almost violent disgust for the media machinery which works to make us celebrities for mass consumption and disposal. Zeno's *Fazit Films* have also been touring a package of 'erotic' films titled *Blues*.

The issue of pornography is debated and discussed very openly in Germany (*Der Spiegel*'s cover story in October, 'Women Love Porno?'), and the experimental film plays a certain part in that discussion. (Zeno's contribution to the Filmer's Almanac is the only film to be considered perhaps 'pornographic' in the collection.) But might we learn to differentiate pornography from erotica? Does pornography mean something closer to prostitution? Someone recently informed me that in Sweden they do not censor sexuality from film and television but rather limit the amounts of violence and war in their children's diets. It is a shame that viewing human intimacies is taboo while images of destruction and murder are approved for general audiences.

I had also hoped to meet in Munster member(s) of the Bonn filmgruppe Schmelz dahin (*Melt Away*). The three members of Schmelz dahin do not attach their names and identities to their films, meaning it is group work, so they function under a privileged anonymity. We see this interest in group film practice also (a few years earlier) in the Berlin performance group Die Tödliche Doris and, to a certain extent, (a few years later) with Alte Kinder. These groups - individuals working together - are not so foolish to either proclaim themselves a 'movement' or to simply sub-divide into the given-names of individual competition. Since there is room for several or many persons to succeed in this prolific German film economy, there seems to be less emphasis on competition, and rather, a type of natural selection leaves the serious filmmakers still standing by the time they are 30 or so. A certain 'boom' in the use of super-8 has passed, but those still standing are developing into the new voices in German cinema: Matthias Müller, Maija-Lene Rettig, Michael Brynstrup, Schmelz dahin. And this new super-8 work shows the influence and attention paid to other media than film, particularly sound/music and print-making.

Schmelz dahin did not turn up in Munster. But back in Bielefeld, Matthias showed me some films of theirs in distribution through Alte Kinder. *Welt Empfänger* (*World Receiver*) is a sunset-red wildlife film of birds in flock and flight. The audio track, a droning radio noise, at one moment re-semes an airplane engine and comments to me on the absurd human drive to fly when considered beside the flight of the wingeds. (What animal that cannot fly can fly?) The simplicity of instinct is so much more 'intelligent' than our human designs. Schmelz dahin films quite often prepare or alter footage from the natural scientist's camera. One member has actually discovered a new species of dragonfly in Africa and, of course, named it after his brother.

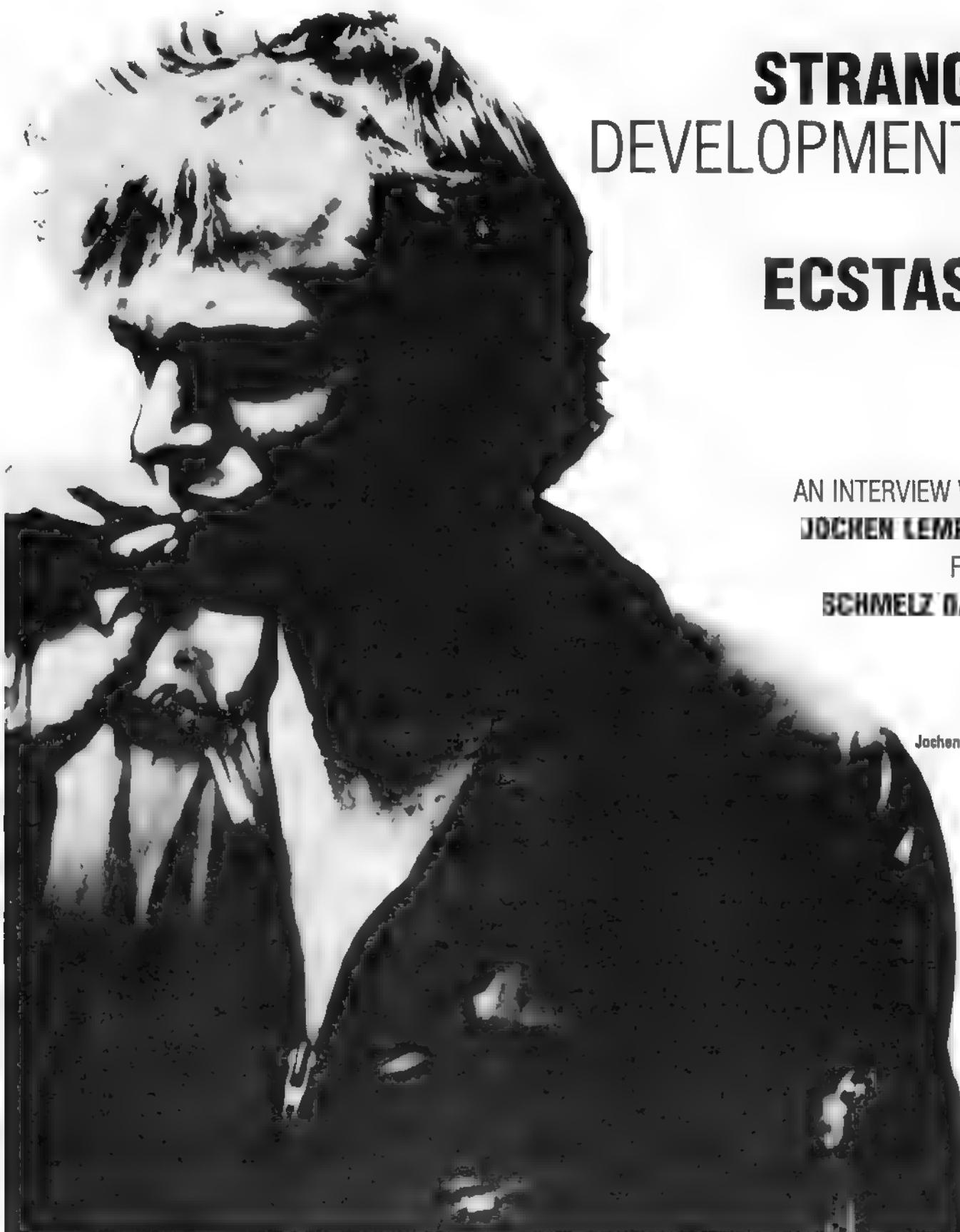


STADT IM FLAMMEN (*City in Flames*) is the most volcanic film I've ever seen; the emulsion literally crawls off the film base, like lava flowing across terrain. Vague generic hospital (soap opera?) footage cracks and crumbles, seethes in the frame in a slow-motion dissolve, like the way ancient paintings crack and fall away from their film surfaces. This is the other side of Schmelz dahin - the mutilated film. Though they may sometimes claim to shoot no film themselves (only re-working found footage), don't believe it. Schmelz dahin also have built a super-8 optical printer with which they make their film discoveries.

FALL 1988

Special thanks to DR. BARBARA MACK for sharing these travels. She is the other of 'we' in this writing.

G E R M A N Y



STRANGE DEVELOPMENTS IN ECSTASY

AN INTERVIEW WITH
JOCHEM LEMPERT
FROM
SCHMELZ DAHIN

Jochen Lempert

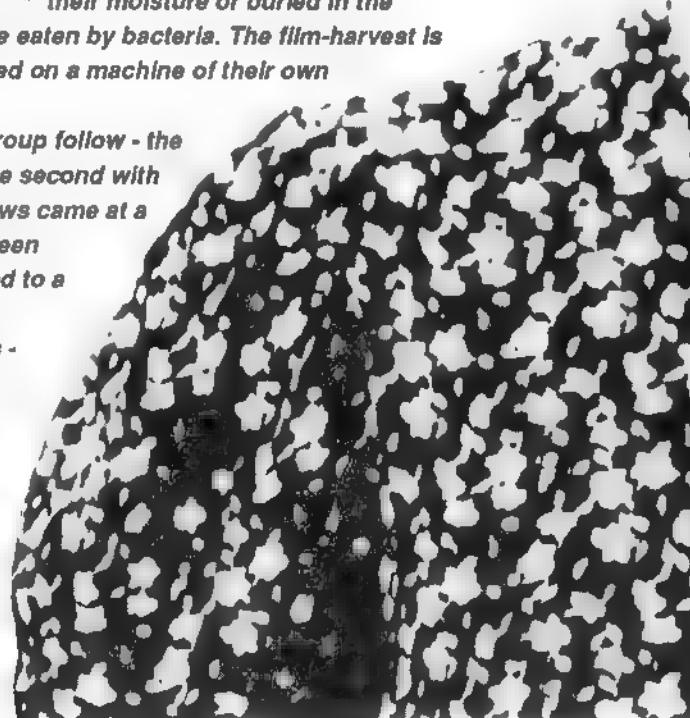
O V E R T H E W A L L

SCHMELZ DAHIN is a super-8 filmmaking collective made up of JOCHEN LEMPERT, JÜRGEN REBLE and JOCHEN MÜLLER. From their beginnings in 1975 they have signed all their work only with their group name: Schmelz dahin, which means 'melt away'. They describe themselves this way: "For instance, we are inside a centrifuge in a submarine. Fortunately, we have forgotten the expedition's task. The navigation is carried out by emotions, waves and heavy eruptic thinking." This self-description extracts the three patterns of their unique and radical approach to imagery. Their experiments are emotional, their images create a synthesis of film and nature codes, and their stories are situated somewhere between the

swarming brain of German expressionist author Gottfried Benn and Stan Brakhage's closed-eye visions. Basic to their work are the various image-creating methods they employ. Schmelz dahin has developed different techniques to destroy, crumble or literally melt away images. Film stock is treated with acid, colored and sketched. Their own or found film footage is submerged in lakes until algae have established themselves in the emulsion, wrapped around plants to absorb their moisture or buried in the

earth until color and grain are eaten by bacteria. The film-harvest is then dried, cleaned and copied on a machine of their own invention.

Two interviews with the group follow - the first with Jochen Lempert, the second with Jürgen Reble. These interviews came at a difficult time; problems between members of the group had led to a (temporary) break-up. How temporary is anyone's guess - the future seems uncertain.



O V E R T H E W A L L

are on a scientific expedition with occasional intense thinking and feeling and accidents. It's a wave... I don't know the English word, it means coincidence. These are the means of our expeditions.

But the work also seems quite political. In *Stadt im Flammen* you've taken a dramatic film, burned away its dramatic surface, destroyed the habits of theatre in order to get back to the film's base, to start over where something else is possible. In this way *Stadt* engages quite directly in the politics of images and image making.

JL:
Of course there are a lot of these things but it's not on purpose. We live with the films as we live with each other so it doesn't have so many purposes, everything gets into it, you don't have to think about it, like making breakfast...

MH:
Can you describe your performance work?

JL:
When we did our European tour last year we started with a performance which shows a loop, the room is dark we have candlelight on and everyone comes in the front and we have a loop of say, *Nosferatu*, and then we start to treat the material with chemicals, so each time it goes through the projector it changes until it's finished, until it's the best possible. Yesterday we made an installation, it's not on the official program we just put it up close to the toilet. It's a double projection, a complete destruction machine. It doesn't destroy itself, it destroys the film. The film runs from the projector into a kitchen blender and gets blown to dust and then the dust is projected. You see

the image only once.

MH:
Is there a big film scene in Bonn?

JL:
No, so it's very good to work in Bonn. You can concentrate, just go on to work on your films in the night.

MH:
Do you all work?

JL:
We all did different things. I used to study, Paul worked occasionally as a set decorator for theatre.

MH:
How do you eat?

JL:
Yeah, that's not easy. It's not clear for me at the moment. The last years we got some grants for some films which was enough to live on for a little while. At the moment it's not too clear how it can continue. There are quite a few places in Germany to show film.

MH:
So you're able to show your work widely...

JL:
That's not a problem.

MH:
Do you always go with your films?

JL:
Usually we want to, the whole thing is to make it an event, not just to show films.

MH:
You have all your films at home, at your own lab?

JL:
Yes.

MH:
Do you see a lot of other people's work?

JL:
In the last years, yes. At the beginning not very much. If you're showing your films more you have more opportunities. It was never very important for our work because it came so much out of our own circumstances.

MH:
Did your wanting to study biology come out of your filmmaking?

JL:
No, I was on a preservation island where I did my civil service for two years on the North Sea. It was a very good time, and I started to study biology on my own. If you're not going to the army you go to the civil service. If you're lucky you get a job like this.

MH:
In a year how much film would you make?

JL:
We're working on material all the time, there's different stages of work. There's continuous work, and then if there's something that's the real film we work on that and use the others just for relaxing (laughs). In a year we finish maybe two-three films, which are only between six and fifteen minutes, it's not very much. It's hard to tell because we sometimes show films at different stages of completion. All of our work is super-8.

JL:
Super-8 is strong in Germany because some people have been working with this for years and are now making interesting films, and they can do this without CVs or money. They make their own films and this is always difficult if you need money. It's a long process to start working and you're more concerned with the result and this is not very helpful. There's also people working in 16mm.

MH:
So you're about 31 - there seems across the country, as there is in Canada, a generation of filmmakers who've made their early films, understand something of the history and are continuing to make work.

JL:
Yeah like Alte Kinder, or Michael Brynntrup, Michael

Krause, Anarchist's Rubber Cell, Uli Sapok, ...

MH:
So there's groups in super-8?

JL:
Yes, at least they have a group name. If you have only technical relationships this doesn't lead to group names or group relationships, maybe that's why it can happen on super-8, you can concentrate not on equipment, and money and technique and just on your group feeling. (laughs) But there are only a few.

SCHMELZ DAHIN FILMOGRAPHY

1975-78: *Scholl's Truhe* (10 min.); *Cutaway* (8 min.); *Die goldenen Sechszigarr* (19 min.)

1979: *Was bin ich* (15 min.)

1983: *Augentrüffel* (5 min.); *Munzesheim* (6 min.); *Sparlich gelungener Wurf mit bosem Löffel* (3 min.); *Der Meister* (3 min.); *50°45'N 7°9'E* (4 min.); *English for today* (3 min.); *Dallas* (5 min.); *Bilderserie* (10 min.); *Such nach verlorenen Selen* (6 min.)

1984: *Rudi Dorfert* (15 min.); *In diep Hust* (6 min.); *Stadt im Flammen* (6 min.); *Pelshing* (1.7 min.); *Die lange Nacht der Kaiserpinguine* (4 min.); *Weltenemfänger* (8 min.)

1985: *Feuerland ist abgebrannt* (6 min.); *Trompetentierchen* (13 min.); *Der Mieter* (3 min.); *Knochel* (div)

1986: *Mauser* (13 min.); *Onkelschrompel* (7 min.); *E.R.* (6 min.); *Situs wie jod, issed ab semit* (6 min.); *Eis* (7 min.); *Aus den Algen* (10 min.); *Der Empfindliche* (5 min.); *Der Rebell* (div)

1987: *Hab ich gesehn, der General* (15 min.)

1988: *Weisspfennig* (6 min.); *Krepl* (8 min.); *Schildmayer Darlaten* (12 min.) 1989: *Rumpelstilzchen* (12 min.); *XXX* (19 min.)

O V E R T H E W A L L

are on a scientific expedition with occasional intense thinking and feeling and accidents. It's a wave... I don't know the English word, it means coincidence. These are the means of our expeditions.

But the work also seems quite political. In *Stadt im Flammen* you've taken a dramatic film, burned away its dramatic surface, destroyed the habits of theatre in order to get back to the film's base, to start over where something else is possible. In this way *Stadt* engages quite directly in the politics of images and image making.

JL:
Of course there are a lot of these things but it's not on purpose. We live with the films as we live with each other so it doesn't have so many purposes, everything gets into it, you don't have to think about it, like making breakfast...

MH:
Can you describe your performance work?

JL:
When we did our European tour last year we started with a performance which shows a loop, the room is dark we have candlelight on and everyone comes in the front and we have a loop of say, *Nosferatu*, and then we start to treat the material with chemicals, so each time it goes through the projector it changes until it's finished, until it's the best possible. Yesterday we made an installation, it's not on the official program we just put it up close to the toilet. It's a double projection, a complete destruction machine. It doesn't destroy itself, it destroys the film. The film runs from the projector into a kitchen blender and gets blown to dust and then the dust is projected. You see

the image only once.

MH:
Is there a big film scene in Bonn?

JL:
No, so it's very good to work in Bonn. You can concentrate, just go on to work on your films in the night.

MH:
Do you all work?

JL:
We all did different things. I used to study, Paul worked occasionally as a set decorator for theatre.

MH:
How do you eat?

JL:
Yeah, that's not easy. It's not clear for me at the moment. The last years we got some grants for some films which was enough to live on for a little while. At the moment it's not too clear how it can continue. There are quite a few places in Germany to show film.

MH:
So you're able to show your work widely...

JL:
That's not a problem.

MH:
Do you always go with your films?

JL:
Usually we want to, the whole thing is to make it an event, not just to show films.

MH:
You have all your films at home, at your own lab?

JL:
Yes.

MH:
Do you see a lot of other people's work?

JL:
In the last years, yes. At the beginning not very much. If you're showing your films more you have more opportunities. It was never very important for our work because it came so much out of our own circumstances.

MH:
Did your wanting to study biology come out of your filmmaking?

JL:
No, I was on a preservation island where I did my civil service for two years on the North Sea. It was a very good time, and I started to study biology on my own. If you're not going to the army you go to the civil service. If you're lucky you get a job like this.

MH:
In a year how much film would you make?

JL:
We're working on material all the time, there's different stages of work. There's continuous work, and then if there's something that's the real film we work on that and use the others just for relaxing (laughs). In a year we finish maybe two-three films, which are only between six and fifteen minutes, it's not very much. It's hard to tell because we sometimes show films at different stages of completion.

All of our work is super-8. Super-8 is strong in Germany because some people have been working with this for years and are now making interesting films, and they can do this without CVs or money. They make their own films and this is always difficult if you need money. It's a long process to start working and you're more concerned with the result and this is not very helpful. There's also people working in 16mm.

MH:
So you're about 31 - there seems across the country, as there is in Canada, a generation of filmmakers who've made their early films, understand something of the history and are continuing to make work.

JL:
Yeah like Alte Kinder, or Michael Brynntrup, Michael

Krause, Anarchist's Rubber Cell, Uli Sapok, ...

MH:
So there's groups in super-8?

JL:
Yes, at least they have a group name. If you have only technical relationships this doesn't lead to group names or group relationships, maybe that's why it can happen on super-8, you can concentrate not on equipment, and money and technique and just on your group feeling. (laughs) But there are only a few.

SCHMELZ DAHIN FILMOGRAPHY

1975-78: *Scholl's Truhe* (10 min.); *Cutaway* (8 min.); *Die goldenen Sechszigarr* (19 min.)

1979: *Was bin ich* (15 min.)

1983: *Augentrüffel* (5 min.); *Munzesheim* (6 min.); *Sparlich gelungener Wurf mit bosem Löffel* (3 min.); *Der Meister* (3 min.); *50°45'N 7°9'E* (4 min.); *English for today* (3 min.); *Dallas* (5 min.); *Bilderserie* (10 min.); *Such nach verlorenen Selen* (6 min.)

1984: *Rudi Dorfert* (15 min.); *In diep Hust* (6 min.); *Stadt im Flammen* (6 min.); *Pelshing* (1.7 min.); *Die lange Nacht der Kaiserpinguine* (4 min.); *Weltenemfänger* (8 min.)

1985: *Feuerland ist abgebrannt* (6 min.); *Trompetentierchen* (13 min.); *Der Mieter* (3 min.); *Knochel* (div)

1986: *Mauser* (13 min.); *Onkelschrompel* (7 min.); *E.R.* (6 min.); *Situs wie jod, issed ab semit* (6 min.); *Eis* (7 min.); *Aus den Algen* (10 min.); *Der Empfindliche* (5 min.); *Der Rebell* (div)

1987: *Hab ich gesehn, der General* (15 min.)

1988: *Weisspfennig* (6 min.); *Krepl* (8 min.); *Schildmayer Darlaten* (12 min.) 1989: *Rumpelstilzchen* (12 min.); *XXX* (19 min.)

G

E R

M A

N

Y

YOU
DESTROY
EVERYTHING



Schmelz Dahin

an interview with CHRISTIANE HEUWINKEL and JÜRGEN REBLE

JÜRGEN REBLE is a member of SCHMELZ DAHIN along with Jochen Müller and Jochen Lempert (see previous interview). Their three-headed collaborations have produced a remarkable body of work over the past fifteen years, including 37 films along with performances, installations and actions. Most of their work has been produced on super-8. With the completion of *City in Flames* in 1984 their work took a new turn, looking to the film material itself to engineer a darkly delirious chemistry that works to reconnect science and nature, human and animal.

CHRISTIANE HEUWINKEL is a founding member of the ALTE KINDER distribution collective. Unlike the members of Schmelz dahin, who work together to produce films under a common name, Alte Kinder's four members work together to present their own work. Born in 1961, she began art history studies 20 years later in the University of Bielefeld, a small city where all the members of Alte Kinder reside. There she met up with Matthias Müller, who encouraged her to participate in the University's film workshop. She did, and along with Müller and six others came together in 1985 to form Alte Kinder. Almost all of their production has been in super-8. It is important to note that no centralized distribution service exists for German experimental film; there are no organizations like the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, Canyon or New York Filmmakers. Alte Kinder's tireless activities, which have taken their super-8 work around the world, is an important self-initiative which has helped introduce audiences to experimental film. Christiane Heuwinkel began her filmwork in 1983, working with Matthias Müller. These close friends have produced five films together. Two other films, 3-minute anyone-can-do-it send ups of *Gone With the Wind* and *Rear Window*, have been made in collaboration with another member of the group, Maija-Lene Rettig. Her most recent film, *Welcome You*, was made for Owen O'Toole's Filmmaker's Almanac. Heuwinkel works exclusively in super-8 and is largely self-financed.

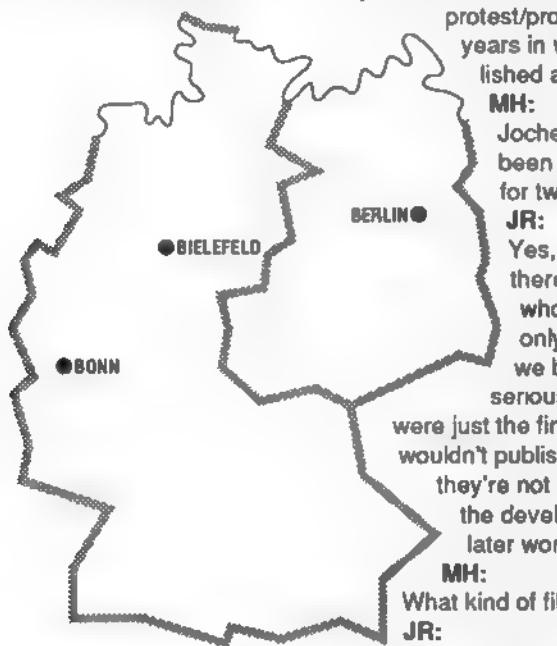
O V E R T H E W A I L

MH

Maybe you could both introduce yourselves.

CH:

My name is Christiane Heuwinkel. I'm a filmmaker and work in a distribution coop called Alte Kinder, begun four years ago. I've worked for nine years in film and only in super-8. After a while I got to know some other filmmakers who worked and lived in the same city, Bielefeld, and we thought as there is no distribution



system for super-8 films in Germany, we should start one. At first we distributed only our own films, eight members' work, and now we are four. After a while we took on other films we knew and liked, for instance films by Schmelz dahin, and the new idea is to get more films by others.

JR:

My name is Jürgen Reble. I live in Bonn. I've worked since 1983 together with two other people under the name Schmelz dahin which means melt away. We tried to work in a group together to change our materials and our ideas, and published films not with our names but only with the name of the group.

MH

Why?

JR:

I think it was a kind of protection because we had no experience with public presentations. Then it was not so hard when someone says, 'Forget it. It's shit. Stop

making films.'

MH:

Why the name Schmelz dahin?

JR:

After one of our first screenings some people said 'schmelz dahin' - that was the only reaction. We work a lot with the material, treating it in different ways. For instance, we put so much light on the film that it burns down while it is projected, and this is also a schmelz dahin, a melt away of the material. So this was a

protest/process of five or six years in which we published a lot of short films.

MH:

Jochen said you've been working together for twelve years.

JR:

Yes, with Jochen, but there's a third person whose been with us only since 1983 when we became more serious. Before 1983 were just the first experiments. I wouldn't publish these today, they're not important to the development of our later work.

MH:

What kind of films were they?

JR:

Joke films. Funny animated films without serious ideas, serious plans.

MH:

Did that change when the third person came in?

JR:

Not directly. In 1983-4 we began to work more intensively on some things, for example, the material. In 1984 one film I think was important was *Stadt im Flammen* or *City in Flames*. This is a very strange, compact film because there's only one scene, the treatment of the material, and the form is very strong. This is for me the first film, we made it for publication. *City in Flames* was a very cheap B-movie, a super-8 copy of a terrible film which contained only action scenes and catastrophes. I buried it in a wet place in the garden and forgot it for about 1/2 year and bacteria spread its different layers. The whole film was disturbed by the bacteria and there emerged something completely different.

Then I threaded it into a sewing machine to make holes into the film, then I copied it on an optical printer. I took four frames from each single frame of the original, and heated it so much that it began to melt. The lens was so hot, as it stood, it melted away (laughs) There is no original left, it's lost to its copy. Then Jochen came and we made the sound together. He had this idea of hitting his chest while droning and it was a good combination. *Stadt im Flammen* was like a structural film, one idea which demonstrates a process. Later we were more interested in montage, to combine themes of different material and open the film in a more analytic way to build up some interesting...

CH:

Levels of association in the film.

MH

There was a shift then in the way you made films, from the costume drama joke films to a three-sided collaboration focussed on the materials. Why this shift?

JR:

We had not much discussion about this, because if someone did something it was accepted by the other two. Most of the films were not made with three but just two, or one made the image and one the sound. In the search to find something new in the material it was difficult for us to have an idea or treatment and only to work on that idea. It was also important to make new experiences, possibilities, change. With normal processes, if you give the film to the lab you always get the same result. If you work on the material you have a lot of possibilities to bring it to a new form. It's not so important to arrange the world around me. For me it's more interesting to take it as it is and make the rest through development.

MH:

The films seem to have both the life of its original, the calling of its origin, but also the scars of this disfigurement, of its remaking. It's very rare that groups evolve in experimental film - Schmelz dahin makes work together, and Alte Kinder distributes together.

CH:

Yes, we have a completely different way of making films. For us it was clear that everyone wanted to make his/her own films but distribute them together. Even if

we help each other in our making, the authorship is clear. I've worked sometimes with a friend of mine, Matthias Müller. We made our first film together when we studied in Bielefeld. Matthias studied art and film, but not only film. I studied German language and history. Apart from this we worked in film together. Then at festivals we got to know some other people who also made films in Bielefeld, and we said, 'Why do

projector. It's beginning a little bit with art galleries. When we started in 1984 there was a terrible prejudice against super-8, they claimed super-8 was for dilettantes, and we said, "we are dilettantes and we are good and we will show you." At the beginning it was not so easy to show our films, but after awhile people knew us, we got a kind of name. They could read about our films and then we got some small prizes, this was something to show them that we work with super-8 not only as amateurs but because we love this material. After our film shows we always discuss how super-8 has a lot of possibilities you don't have with other materials - 16mm or video. We've shown our work in festivals, small art galleries, Kommunale Kinos, youth centres, drop in centres, film clubs, cafes, bars....

CH:

This is the central problem. From the beginning we always showed our films accompanied by one or two of the filmmakers. One introduces the film, the other projects. Afterwards we discuss the films. This is the central point, that you have a person who can speak about the films so they're not anonymous.

MH:

I work for a distribution company and it's completely different. We send out hundreds of films each year.

JR:

To festivals?

MH:

No, there's too many. They go mostly to schools. This is a big difference in our two countries, that we could never send someone along with our films, but you show work in a public way, outside the university, and as a result your work is much less academic. Why don't you show your work in the schools as well? Many people teach courses in experimental film.

JR:

I think you can find 40 places in Germany to tour.

We did it last year.

CH:

This is a problem. If you want to make film you can't distribute it at the same time; it's too much work. So we set up some dates, say two in a month, then next month nothing, then four shows. It's too difficult to organize a real tour going from town to town for a month. But for instance when another member,

Maija-Lene Rettig, went to London she organized four dates there. A year later she was invited back by the Goethe Institute in England. Then the leader of the G.I. in London told the G.I. in Israel

and try to make it productive for our work. A friend of ours, a former member of Alte Kinder, worked only with news shows, and put the material in new contexts and made his own political stories out of them. Or you can have your own material and use it like TV images, photographing it in super-8, refilming it in video, then rephotographing it in super-8, a working through of generations which bears the trace of each of its stages. The image itself reveals a history.

MH:

I think that TV makes experimental film impossible because one learns to look in a certain way. If people watched only

I buried it in a wet place in the garden and forgot it for about 1/2 year and bacteria spread its different layers. The whole film was disturbed by the bacteria and there emerged something completely different. Then I threaded it into a sewing machine to make holes into the film, then I copied it on an optical printer. I took four frames from each single frame of the original, and beat it so much that it began to melt.

we go separately to these festivals? Why don't we go together as we're all filmmakers from Bielefeld? So we began the distribution, showing our films in several places.

MH:

Is it difficult to show super-8?

CH:

Some of the Kommunale Kinos show it, but often we have to bring our own

that I wanted to show films there and that was okay so I went to Israel. Matthias has shown films in the U.S.A. and received new invitations as a result and next year he will try to go again. It's a kind of network you develop.

MH:

But always dependent on someone going out with the films?

O V E R T H E W A L L

experimental film your work would seem quite normal.

CH:

The TV style creates a problem for other styles.

MH:

Some would argue that the experimental film is a small scene, with its own codes, its own ways of making. Some have said the Osnabrück festival isn't exciting because so much of this new work looks old.

JR:

I think there's some things that are important only for yourself. For the people who organize the festivals they need to choose only the really new films.

MH:

How does the group of Schmelz dahin decide whether a film's finished or not?

JR:

Sometimes we decide one or two years later; it's a difficult question. A lot of people should realize what they publish and what they don't. For instance Brakhage has produced a lot of films, but not every film is important to show to the public. It would be better to have a little bit of self-control.

MH:

But how would he know what's public or private?

CH:

I think this is something you decide for each case. When you see the work of Schmelz dahin as a whole you see some works are more important than others. German films are quite different from one another; when you see many experimental films you can say, "I think this film comes from Berlin."

MH:

How can you tell a film is from Berlin?

CH:

Some years ago in every Berlin film it was fashionable to show the wall and policemen on both sides, the Reichstag and the Olympia Stadium, the fascist architecture. Then there were black and white films that were very flat, grey. This was another kind of fashion. There are some special themes or ways of doing it within each film group or school. For instance in the art school in Bremen where Klaus Telscher teaches they

develop their own material, so they have a special outlook. You can say, "I think this film is made in Bremen." But this isn't so important because there's so many places to work.

MH:

Is there an Alte Kinder look?

JR:

(to CH) In the *Flamethrowers* film you're working as a group, but everyone has their own style. I think the most important point is the name, it's your common point.

MH:

Can you describe the *Flamethrower* project?

CH:

Owen O'Toole sent us three super-8 film

thing we show at the moment, but we'll try to blow it up to 35mm.

JR:

We tried to make a third part, taking some of the images that Owen O'Toole and Alte Kinder used and joining them with our own. One condition was to make black and white films, as all the other films were black and white, which was the first time for us, so we tried to find a new method to put the color onto black and white. We found a possibility and made the third part in red and black and white. On the optical printer we shot some stills and repeats of other parts and then introduced our own material.

CH:

What was special about the material

CONTINENTAL
BREAKFAST
BY
Matthias Müller
WITH
Christiane Heuwinkel



reels which were made from the first independent film in India. He wrote us, "Do what you want with this material, use it as footage for your own work." We imagined showing them altogether, on three screens. Then we took our own associations and responded. Everyone had a different idea. Two or three days later we realized our films together. We made a second series of three reels. Then we thought that Schmelz dahin might be interested to make the third generation, so we sent them the material. We showed it in Bielefeld as a triple projection, first the three reels by Owen, then Alte Kinder, then Schmelz dahin, but it was very complicated to find three projectors, so we made a kind of trailer which combines the triple projections and pictures from each one. This is some-

Owen sent was that it was almost destroyed. You see traditional Indian scenes, but because the material was heated during projection...

JR:

He saw the film in a regular cinema - and the projectionist must have been sleeping; I don't know - and the film was burning away. He asked if he could have it because it couldn't be used any more. Then he made three reels of this material.

CH:

When we saw these great holes within the frame we made an association with pearls, so we filmed a woman lying on the ground with pearls running down her face and body. Sometimes you see the same image in each projector, sometimes with a delay in time, some-

times no picture left and right, only in the middle. Each projector is an instrument. Three chapters. As we watch it we watch the journey of the film through time.

■■■

Can you describe the films you made after *Stadt im Flammen*?

JR:

We work very closely with our material. We have an archive from which we derive our ideas, our process of working.

of found footage. You're consistent in working on the chemical level of film and working with very heterogeneous material which is combined in new ways.

MH:

Your films are very aggressive.

CH:

Yes Jürgen, because you always destroy, you destroy the film material, you cut open the rat, and in the last film you destroyed your mother.

CH:

(laughs) Sorry.

JR: Sometimes there are no images on the film any more but after one or two years the algae is settled into the emulsion of the film.

MH:

What kind of footage was it?

JR:

Old footage which wasn't important. At the same time we made a narrative section, a figure who demonstrates what's going on with the material, then you see that it happens, and he looks to the film and the film starts. It's a demonstration of what happens to the material. In some parts of the film you can see the rest of the images, of what remains after. Between 1983-87 we did a lot of biological treatment, but now we work more with chemicals.

MH:

Do you process all your own footage?

JR:

Yes, and we make our own prints. This is the possibility to make real independent films, which is why I'm still working on super-8.

MH:

But you've received grants?

JR:

Yes, but we're always working on super-8.

■■■

What does one of your films cost?

JR:

\$70. And another \$70 for the print. To blow it up is more but I don't know if this is necessary because in Germany there's a lot of possibilities to show super-8. I think in North America it's different.

CH:

For me I'll go on in super-8. With our last film, which is called *Epiolog*, we tried many different things while working. We thought maybe it was possible to re-film the film in another way, so we tried it. Three minutes only costs us \$10, so it doesn't matter if it comes out with nothing on it. 16mm is too expensive to play with. Our cameras are very small, you can carry them everywhere with you and be spontaneous.

MH:

Do you take the camera with you all the time?

CH:

Not at the moment, but I did when I was

When we started in 1984 there was a terrible prejudice against super-8, they claimed super-8 was for dilettantes, and we said, "we are dilettantes and we are good and we will show you."

We have our own inclinations, our relation to science and nature, and on the other hand we listen, we learn from the film. Many things exist by chance, but it's a selected chance. If you make a film in your head first, you could never imagine these films.

MH:

Is there a look to the Schmelz dahin films, a continuity to your public expression? Are there answers before questions? I think working on the film's surface is a theme, as well as a concern for the name of the group - melt away - a name which expresses itself on a very material level not just in *Stadt im Flammen* but in a number of other films, like the *Flamethrowers*. It's as if this name, taken by chance, held in it a kind of future which could serve both as a mark of your public expression as well as an antidote to the films you find around you, that every join implies both the heat of union, as well as the dissolve of its surroundings.

CH:

At the beginning when we saw the *Flamethrowers* we thought, "Ah, this must be made by Schmelz dahin". You always use animals as commentators to things which happen on the screen. On the sound track you often use short bits

MH:

In *Rumpelstilzchen*?

CH:

You see a woman pushing a tractor, it was his mother.

JR:

And the last part was my son.

CH:

In another film you showed your father.

JR:

My father made some home movies, this is part of the archive now. (laughs) I took this material. It's not just a destruction but building also on this destruction, like Germany.

MH:

There seems a kind of conflict between you and your archive, that it needs to be forced, melted, burned, scarred, to show what's there, undergo these trials...

JR:

I live very close to the material, my trees are full of films. I hang them and leave them there for two or three years.

CH:

Schmelz dahin made a film which is called *Out of the Algae*, where they stored their film in a kind of fish tank for several months...

JR:

Years.

O V E R T H E W A L L

in Israel. I couldn't shoot anything at first because the situation in Israel at that moment was so strange. After two months I began to shoot a little, using the camera as a diary. When I got back I had many film reels, but the film I finally made for Owen O'Toole's Filmmakers Almanac is just four minutes.

The shooting in super-8 seems very immediate but the editing is no different than any other gauge.

CH:
It changes from film to film. In Israel I wanted to make a film of my impressions of this strange country. And as my emotions changed during my stay I had the problem of finding an adequate soundtrack - a commentary on my inner conflict. Other films are very planned; for one I made special drawings, a storyboard.

MH:
Jürgen, can you talk about how you use the camera? After you've been picking through your archive do you decide as a group to go out and shoot?

JR:
It's similar to what Christiane was saying, it's a form of diary, of watching your environment. Often I shoot images and don't know why, it's just material. It's not often that I search for material in a specific way.

MH:
Do you catalogue your archive?

JR:
Most of the images are in my head.

MH:
How big is the archive?

JR:
It changes. To start a film I need about ten hours of material. At times I'm just collecting, I don't know why. Then if I have enough I start to treat the material and make different copies and different processes. The new film I'm working on is more selective material and also longer, but that's another story.

MH:
Will that be a Schmelz dahan film?

JR:
We're not working together.

CH:

It's a kind of divorce.

JR:

If I'm working with other people it's very important to live close to them and to have contact, and experiences. Paul is living 300 km away so I can't meet him, and the other has been traveling for the last half a year, so there's no chance to continue.

POSTSCRIPT: EXCERPTS OF A LETTER FROM CHRISTIANE HEUWINKEL

22.1.90

DEAR MIKE,

Thank you very much for your letter and the interview....When Matthias got the letter, I [was] in Munich, and when I came home I had lots of work which could not be postponed (just jobs to earn some money, nothing serious), so I put

*MELT AWAY - it's as if this name,
taken by chance, held in it a
kind of future which could
serve both as a mark of your
public expression as well as an
antidote to the films you find
around you, that every join
implies both the beat of union,
as well as the dissolve of
its surroundings.*

off what is really important, and gave preference to filthy lucre. Foolish!.... I think it is not mere accident that in both interviews my remarks often refer to co-productions (with Matthias) or the work of the other interlocutor. In contrast to

Matthias or Schmelz dahan, for instance, I am no full-time film artist, more or less an amateur. And in the last two years, when to them filming became more serious and also a way for them to earn their living, my interests changed from practice to theory. Maybe because I am not so creative. I started working at the university after finishing my first exam, and now begin work on a dissertation about early film criticism in German newspapers. It's not that I gave up filming, but at the moment there is other work to be done! A strange situation when Maija, Thomas and Matthias had the premiere of their new films, and I stood there, with nothing in my hands! So sometimes my feelings change - from feeling myself as a part of Alte Kinder and then of drifting away. Maybe this has to do with our problems of finding time for an interview. Sometimes I have the tendency to draw back - and later I regret.

In three weeks I will go to India and show Alte Kinder films in Bombay and Poona. It is very exciting, as the Goethe Institute first invited me and then never responded to my letters. Then, when nothing was clear, Jörg and I decided to buy tickets, call for the visa.... Sometimes I like this feeling of having to improvise, of trying to make the best out of a situation. And I have never been so far east...

Hope I will hear from you soon. Yours, Christiane!

CHRISTIANE HEUWINKEL FILMOGRAPHY

Nature Morte 26 min 1983 (with Matthias Müller)
Rapunzl 15 min 1983 (with Matthias Müller)
Wanderer Im Nebelmeer 17 min 1983/4 (with Matthias Müller)
Rear Window 3 min 1984 (with Maija-Lene Rettig)
Gone With the Wind 3 min 1985 (with Maija-Lene Rettig)
Danke 2 min 1985 (with Matthias Müller)
Die Schöne Landschaft 7 min 1985
Epilog 16 min 1986/7 (with Matthias Müller)
Welcome You 4 min 1988/89 (for the Filmers' Almanac)

G

E

R

M

A

N

Y

take COURAGE

an interview with MAIJA-LENE RETTIG

MAIJA-LENE RETTIG is a founding member of the *ALTE KINDER* distribution collective, a group that includes Christiane Heuwinkel, Matthias Mueller and Thomas Lauks. Born in Tampere, Finland in 1962 she studied art 20 years later at the University of Bielefeld. There she met up with the people who would eventually become *Alte Kinder* and began her work in film. She has produced 15 short films since 1982, often working in collaboration with other members of the group. Her most recent film *L'Appesa - Die Gehängte* is her first 16mm production; the rest were made in super-8. She is presently enrolled in the Braunschweig Art Academy along with Matthias Mueller, Michael Brynntrup and other German notables to attend experimental film classes headed up by Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. Their attendance is spurred not so much by a need for further education but for the state subsidies offered to students.



Matthias Mueller, Christiane Heuwinkel, Thomas Lauks, Maija-Lene Rettig of ALTE KINDER

I V E R T H E W A I L

MH:

How did you get interested in making films?

MLR:

By chance. I started studying art at Bielefeld University, drawing and painting mostly, and I got to know Matthias Mueller who urged me to come see the super-8 film class. I thought, 'Why not try it?' This was around 1982. There was a lucky constellation of people and circumstances, other members of what would become the Alte Kinder group. It was all very new and we liked each other. We organized screenings with our first films and it all went very well, many people came and were very encouraging.

MH:

It seems unusual that student work was being presented outside the school. So even at the beginning there was an interest in both production and exhibition.

MLR:

Yes. Very quickly we made short films, many of which were comments on famous feature films. Christiane Heuwinkel and I re-made *Rear Window* and *Gone with the Wind* as three minutes shorts. These films were important as the initial impetus in our making, to get into the material, but as films they're no longer so important.

MH:

Did you have a specific interest in Hollywood film?

MLR:

My interest in film didn't come out of art but Hollywood and television. After this period of group work I began to make more personal films and found that I tend to make the same film again and again. These deal with problems of identity and identification, of understanding a person as you would their signature.

MH:

I think that's very strong in Hollywood films as well - because every moment in every person's life seems charged with a significance that relates to the whole story. They construct dramas of characterization where all of the depicted events are meaningful - I don't think this is how most of us feel when we're just going through it all.

MLR:

I always allow the contradictions, breaks and differences to show, which are neglected in these Hollywood clichés.

MH:

When you say you want to image yourself as a whole in a film which isn't able to show everything, which is always a partial view, when you realize at the outset that the film will exclude almost everything - how do you go about deciding what's in and what's out?

MLR:

It always begins with an idea. In *L'Appesa - Die Gehängte* for instance, the theme of polarity shows someone torn into two bodies, one black, one white. Later on, in the shooting, I realized that the conflict is completely personal - that the film comes from this need. Eisenstein said there is no art without conflict. In *Red Roses*, the menstruation film, I began with found footage from a 1950s film: *Sleeping Beauty*. I wrote down the associations I had and uncovered different scenes. A woman comes to her house and finds a rose in her mailbox with a letter saying 'I'm sorry'. Then she sits at a table and reacts to this sign, starting her own letter before taking the rose out of its vase and unfolding it, destroying it. The other scene shows another woman with blood on her legs taking a bath. In my work there's always this mix of different levels regarding a conflict.

MH:

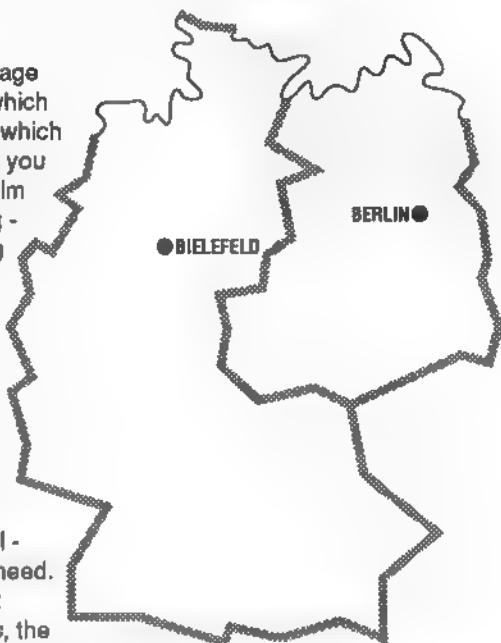
In *Red Roses*, you said you began with a dramatic text, *Sleeping Beauty*, and then made a drama of your own. We see someone walking at the beginning and the end, coming to a house where she opens the letter with a rose attached. These outside shots bracket the interior experience. Most of the action takes place inside the house, inside her mind. This is where she stages the experience of her menstruation.

MLR:

These images of menstruation remain more than others, but it's only one part. It's not a menstruation film, it's only one aspect of the problem. The theme is the conflict between tension and relaxation. It's about the fear of losing one's identity or letting go.

MH:

In your found footage we watch a repeated image of *Sleeping Beauty* asleep surrounded by roses, coveted by



a man who kisses her and brings her to life again.

MLR:

That's how it is in the fairy tale. But I photographed the film in reverse. At the beginning she's awake and lively and they both go into the room and she sits down on the bed and he kisses her and then she falls asleep. Because they're moving in such a strange way you can't tell they're moving in reverse.

MH:

In *Sleeping Beauty* she pricks her finger on a spinning wheel, and this drop of blood causes 100 years of sleep and the closing of the castle until the prince comes. It never occurred to me that the blood comes on her 16th birthday, that it's a story about menstruation.

MLR:

The menstruation is about accepting herself as an individual - for her or for me during that time, this bleeding was a house.

MH:

The way you've photographed the blood is very aestheticized, very beautiful. There's many ways you could have photographed it, why this way?

MLR:

There are two actresses. One comes to the house and finds the rose with a letter, writes another and slowly tears the petals from a rose. The other woman moves to the bathroom, bleeding. This is another important aspect of the film, being confronted with the other self. Both

G

E R M A N Y

women exhibit different aspects of the self - one personifies tension while the other is able to let go.

MH:

This is the split we see in *L'Appesa*.

MLR:

Right. Like in *Red Roses* I began with the theme of polarity - of looking like one person but experiencing myself only in division. In *L'Appesa* I wanted to express this division in a formal way, by working with an actress. In the beginning it was only important that she could look large and small at the same time, which was important for the theme of polarity. But slowly her history, childhood and experience became important. Her childhood was filled with rigid ideals from the church, with this terrible separation of good and bad, and I realized I shared her ideas without being Catholic, that the church was inside somehow.

MH:

In the film you've made this split a physical one. Both the good and bad parts have bodies.

MLR:

The white body and the black one. If I work with film I have to put my ideas in front of the camera, I have to make them physical. This is my way. There are other ways. Matthias works with the material, he's going through his personal conflicts by working with the surface. My work tends towards feature film elements, actors, etc.

MH:

Yet throughout your work the drama is interior - each part of the mise-en-scène reflecting some aspect of the psyche, the image composed of metaphors and symbols. And these symbols return always to the protagonist, they never move outside, into causality, into stories. Your films seem to exist before the making of stories is possible. Why this interest in symbolism?

MLR:

That's difficult for me to answer, because this working with symbols is often a critique I hear. People say, 'I can't stand it any more, it's too much and too obvious in her work.' Some say they can see the end in its beginning, it's too obvious. From these reactions I started to wonder if it's a good idea to work with these clichés, because a symbol can be also a cliché. Since I've decided to work with symbols I have decided to go a very

difficult way - it can be regarded as a cliché and nothing else. On the other hand, these images are very anchored, very strong. Their history continues to speak through their misuse. Working with symbols shows both aspects.

MH:

The symbols in *L'Appesa* show a splintered self who moves towards an integration, a marriage of these halves. You said before that you weren't interested in Hollywood films because they flatten difference and contradiction, intent on showing a seamless narrative, whereas your own experience reveals a fragmented body of parts. In *L'Appesa* all these contradictions are held in an opposition that's also simpler than life - what's the difference between these two kinds of reduction? How do you reveal your own life translated into symbols?

MLR:

It's necessary for the film to reduce and to make these abstractions. This idea of polarity seems at the root. Without difference everything is the same, and as soon as it isn't there's conflict.

MH:

Can you describe the ways in which these two try to come together?

MLR:

The strongest scene is the one in which the white woman chains herself while the other splashes her with water. This is the moment where they fight, an action suspended throughout most of the film. It was necessary to express their differences, the intensity of the conflict. Often they move through a number of spaces. I had the idea that one should kill the other to create clarity or unity, but it's impossible to find clarity by destroying.

MH:

There's a short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in which he tells the story of a woman. It's set in a room with a wash-stand, a mirror and a picture of Our Lady of Good Hope on the wall, and this woman gets out of bed and opens the door and walks into another room that looks just the same, with a door on the far wall, which lets her into another room that looks just the same, and so on. She spends all of her days and nights this way, walking from one room to the next. Once each day her son would come to visit and she would make her way back through all of the rooms and they would talk. But one day she comes back to the

wrong room, and then she's insane. I think there's a relation to *L'Appesa* because everyone moves through landscapes without being a part of them.

MLR:

They are ill. The disease turns one inside, not simply to affliction, but towards metaphor. Illness is the way the brain talks to its body, it shows itself. Some time ago I felt that my films were too personal - dealing with personal conflicts, subjective and closed and egocentric - and then I found out through other's reactions that the films gave them something. I can only make films by starting with my very personal conflicts. I'm sure there are people who say, 'Why do you show the films? It's only for yourself, they're self-therapy.' But I think if there are only three people in the audience who have an idea or think of their personal conflicts then it's reason enough to make a film (laughs). But it's still a bit of a problem for me. I feel I'm too much concerned with my identity and myself. I sometimes think I should care more about political, social contexts.

MH:

Can you talk about *Take Courage* and how that came about?

MLR:

In 1986 I went to London for three months mainly to improve my English and to arrange Alte Kinder screenings. It was the first time I had been alone in such a big city. It was like a birth. I threw myself into this new world and started shooting without a concept except the idea of making a film about my stay in London. I used the camera like a diary, it was always with me. In a feature film I have actors and the stage. In London it was the streets, the buildings, the people. I filmed myself in color and the outside I filmed in b/w. So this film also has to do with this theme of polarity, of inside and out.

MH:

The shots of you in the film are very intimate, you're in a bed very close-up. But the outside shots are often made from a tram or streetcar so there's a distance right away, you're just passing through these vistas, and you've filmed through these great iron X's holding up the bridge, Xing out the surround. People are never made particular...

MLR:

There's no difference between the

O V E R T H E W A L L

buildings and the people. There's some close-ups of people in the mass.

MH:

Even those are taken in such a way as to present their strangeness. All these other lives surround us but without a way to connect with the life you're living, and the camera enters to register this difference.

MLR:

It's a very narcissistic film because I view London from a very personal point of view. Perhaps this is why the film is so round, so complete. The material was shot in three months - three rolls of color and four rolls of black and white. The editing was another thing, another stage of looking at my looking.

■■■

The film is an anti-tourist film, because



tourists travel and the camera enters to make the strange familiar, to give you a position, a bearing, to be able to master and contain experience. Your film seems to speak of the impossibility of arriving somewhere else. *Take Courage*, the film's title, is also a sign on a building which you pass by.

MLR:

It's an ad for a beer called 'Courage'. It was one of the first things that struck me when I drove into London, I saw a building with 'Take Courage', and it got into my head, it was like a motto and I found it again and again. I lived outside the centre of London in Blackheath, and everyday I came by train and passed this sign. It was for me a very personal message. This also reveals how autistic the film is, I'm the centre of the film and



Left: ROSENROT; Right: TAKE COURAGE

everything is related back to my life, the idea which makes it so compact. It's very focussed.

MH:

What will you do now?

■■■

I'm planning a feature film about brother-sister incest, but I'm struggling with it. I also doubt the 'feature' of the feature film and if this is really my way, but I would like to try it, to write a screenplay with actors and a story. On the other hand I have this idea, a reworking of

my last film. In *L'Appesa* there's something I couldn't realize. The film shows a process of stagnation without developments or outburst. During the editing I attended the Berlin Film Festival and had these dreams of a white dress burning, and I thought, 'This is the final scene in the film.' We shot it there, but it failed completely. The communication didn't work - my images were clear but I couldn't translate them - so I decided to try again, doing the camerawork myself. We shot for two days and when I stood behind the camera it was wonderful and the light was good and it all very mystical. Then I got the material back and it was nothing. What I felt during the shooting is so different from what's on the film it was really shocking for me, like a slap in the face. I'd like to make a film

about that difference, and how I'll try to change this failure of communication into something else, something more concrete, to go outside.

MAIJA-LENE RETTIG FILMOGRAPHY

Ausdrücke 20 min 1982
Rituale 8 min 1983 (with Christine Saunders)
1 Fuss = 30,48 CM 3 min. 1984 (with Tommi Fechner)
Das Leben Ist Hart Genug 3 min 1984
Rear Window 3 min. 1984 (with Christiane Heuwinkel)
Gone With the Wind 3 min. 1984 (with Christiane Heuwinkel)
Tell 3 1 min. 1984
Liebe Ela, Ich 1984/5 (with Tommi Fechner)
Rosenrot (Red Roses) 12 min 1985-7
Take Courage 9 min 1986/7
Die Unsichtbaren Bilder 19 min 1986/7
Was Ist Das Ziel? 3 min 1987 (with Dirk Schafer)
Der Kleine Tod 15 min 1987/88 (with Bernd Bohm)
L'Appesa - Die Gehängte (16mm) 30 min 1988/9
The Flamethrowers (co-author with Owen O'Toole, Schmelz dahin, and Alte Kinder) 10 min.

(All films in super-8 unless otherwise noted.)

G

E

R

M

A

N

Y

people are
DYING
in front of your shoes

an interview with THOMAS LAUKS

At 28 years of age, **THOMAS LAUKS** is both the youngest and the newest member of **ALTE KINDER**, the distribution collective that also includes Maija-Lene Rettig, Christiane Heuwinkel and Matthias Mueller. In 1985 Lauks began studies in photography and film in Bielefeld, the small city in the west of Germany where all the members of Alte Kinder reside. A year later he joined the group. He has completed nine short super-8 films since 1985. Influenced by the surreal writings of Andre Breton, Lauks has combined his passion for exquisite corpse literature with a rigorous technical background.



TOURNESOL

O V E R T H E W A L L

MH:

How did you get interested in film?

TL:

After I did my civil service in Heidelberg for three years I went back to Bielefeld in 1983 to study photography at the Design School. I had to wait two years to get in because many people wanted to study there. I worked for a year in a printing factory and made pictures. Then I joined the school. A year later I saw my first screening of Alte Kinder.

Matthias Müller (stepping into room): This changed his life, his perceptions, his future, everything.

TL:

I didn't know anything about this kind of filmwork but when I saw it I thought there was something else that could be done - that I had different ideas about film. I was living then with four friends, all musicians in a band together. Twice a week they jammed while I always went to my dark room

at night, alone. I was a little jealous; I also wanted to meet people while creat-

instance, you saw photographs in *The Fall*, and a theatre play in *The Park*.

MH:

Can you talk about your first film?

TL:

Before school I lived together with four friends, and I was the only one to get up in the morning. When I came home to have lunch in the middle of the day they were just sitting and having breakfast together and talking about their new projects and new music. It was a hard time and I often shut the clock off and slept in. I got the idea to make a film about that situation. I was very interested in the films of Bunuel, especially *The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, where people from different parts of the story walk along one long road together, saying nothing to each other. I made a quotation of that film; my film was called *Public Holidays*. I took my friends and put them on a swing. It was a picture of my situation: they are swinging through their lives and I am working. I made a film in three parts. A man dreams about

a beautiful woman. After that a shadow comes down the stairs with a hammer and beats him on the head. Then he continues sleeping and has a bad dream of burning toast, a breakfast nightmare. He gets up late and listens to the weather forecast. That's it.

MH:

And the next one was much later - after you'd seen the Alte Kinder work?

TL:

When I was in school, I was interested in the books of Breton and Louis Aragon, the surrealist writers of France. I was very much in love with a girl and she left me and this was a situation to make a film about. Often I need such situations to go on, to force me to work. So I made a film about love in black and white using quotes from Aragon and Breton. Most are from Aragon, not to illustrate but to create together with the pictures - to give people the chance to fill the film with their own experience. Most films give people an idea about what the filmmaker wants to say that one can't do anything but consume. I think filmmaking and film seeing should be like reading a book, when you read you fill sentences

with your own imagination, you bring your own pictures. An audience should be able to feel their own experience in a film, to be involved.

MH:

Did you meet Alte Kinder around this time?

TL:

It was after the second film, around 1985, and I joined a year later. I was in Berlin at the InterFilm Festival and one evening I drove home with Maija Lene-Rettig. She took me in her car because we were going the same way, and she asked me, 'Why don't you join Alte Kinder, since we're from the same town?' And I also thought 'We're from the same town, living five minutes away from each other, having little money and making the same kind of films. We could work together.' There were seven members when I started; I was the last to join.

MH:

What did joining mean? What were your responsibilities?

TL:

It wasn't difficult. I knew Maija a little, having gone to school with her, and the others were not total strangers. There were meetings every two weeks to talk about what to do next, what festivals were coming up, which presentations in what town, who made contacts with whom and so on. They invited me and I came and we worked together.

MH:

The two films you just showed us were around this time? *The Park*?

TL:

The Park was later. We started to make a theatre piece at the beginning of 1986 with some friends of mine and it lasted one year, until the end of 1987. We had the idea not to produce a play authored by someone else but to make it our own, in different medias. We asked many friends to join us, everyone had a role - musicians, actors, filmmakers. I wanted to see whether it was possible for people to work together to make something. After a year we broke up, it didn't work in the end. We produced one scene, and I wrote two others but there was no one left to play it. We ran out of time for each other.

MH:

You made two films for this play - *The Fall* and *The Park* - perhaps you could say a little about each of them.



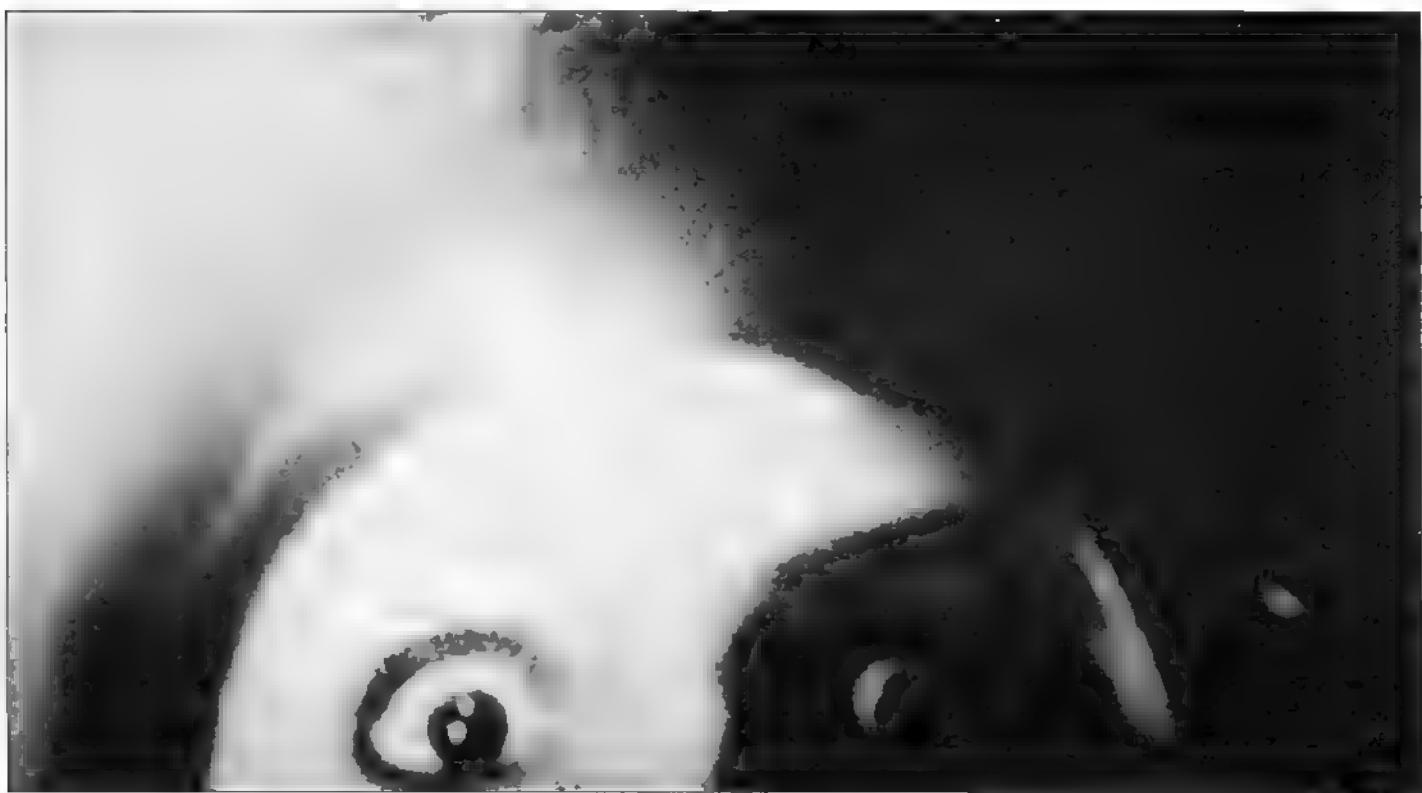
ing. That was another reason to start filmmaking.

MH:

So you were in school?

TL:

Yes, and the third reason was that the stills were not enough. I'm interested in different things - literature, photography and film and theatre - and I was looking for a way to bring them together. For



THE HACON

TL:

The Fall is in the first scene. It is the dream of a young girl, she's onstage dreaming in bed. The film plays over the bed while the band plays live. In the beginning it shows the roof of a big house and there are outlooks over the town. The camera shows the dreamer's sight, you never see her, you see a hole in the roof, and a person running around that hole in the roof and finally jumping. It's about a suicide. The second part consists of animated photographs - I took pictures of this place and animated them. It's about the feelings and ideas and associations this person has while falling down. Periodically you see the ground coming near. The fall lasts a long time and she has many ideas, of love, sex, crime and beauty. In the end there is only the ground with nothing happening. No one hits the ground. On the other side, in parallel montage, flowers for a grave. So the person has come down and the film ends, the music ends. The young girl lying in bed wakes with a cry, and there's a person in her room. This person is called The Visitor and he's the one who jumped from the roof in the film. In the beginning she doesn't realize he's

dead. She asks many questions because she's very confused and suicidal. In the end the woman becomes more alive in their dialogue and he gets more and more weak. In the end she falls in love with him. Then she realizes he's a dead man, that it's impossible. Then he disappears.

The Park is about another couple in the play. A couple walks in a park and everywhere people are killing each other while this couple speak about love and all the good things in life. It's a little satiric, ironic. Then they sit on a bench and kiss. Their love making is like machinery, they only make love because they're bored, they don't know what else to do. They're exhausted afterwards, and the light goes out and the film begins over the bench where they are sitting.

The film was shot single frame, I was walking with the camera and counting 1-2-3 click. We shot it one afternoon. After it was finished, it was too fast to be seen so I multiplied every picture until each one became three. The camera assumes different positions throughout. At the beginning it walks behind the couple, at another time it takes over the position of the man who passes by the woman.

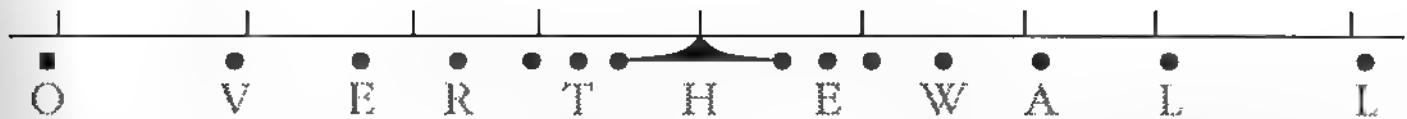
Then it takes up her position and the man makes funny little games of love, coming behind her and putting hands over her eyes, and she has a little dream of a different park, a park like a sea, it's waving and very dark and you see only the tops of the trees. It's in her mind. Then they come across machines for children to play with, and the camera takes up the position of the people playing there. So being in love means always to be without a fixed point of identification, or identity. At the end the camera takes the man's position and the games they play become more serious. He's following her, they're still playing and she walks away on her hands. Then she's lying down on the grass, and he tries to catch her and they kiss.

■■■

Because the camera takes up one person's position for an extended length of time, the film shows an incredibly elongated version of shot-countershoot cutting, disallowing the omniscient view this view usually grants an audience.

TL:

It was important to show a common mind. What a woman looks for in a man is another woman.



■■■
Can you talk about the color in the film?

TL:
This was the first film to be made on a self-built optical printer. At that time it was in a very experimental state - I didn't have the right combination of lenses and optical systems. The first version of the film was shot in 16mm on Fuji, but the final cut has a strong red color which comes from the generations of re-printing. The first copy washed out the colors and the second copy intensified the remaining colors. When I made these copies there was a second effect resulting from a mistake in the optics called chromatic aberration, where the colors of light moving through an optical system which hasn't been corrected have different focal lengths. Their distribution isn't even, so the optical mistake separates the colors. On the left side everything has a red contour and on the right a blue one. Also the edges of the frame show a kind of zoom effect,

they're spheric, bent.

■■■
It's like the picture's swimming, it has a fever. Yesterday I saw your film *Stampede*, made for Owen O'Toole's Filmmaker's Almanac, in which you have to choose a day and make a film for it and mail it to him.

TL:
It was the 13th of June, 1988. I was on vacation with my girlfriend. She's not the only actor; there's also some sheep and a dead crab. We were completely relaxed lying in big chairs at the seaside, very beautiful. Like me, Katharina is studying photography and when she began taking pictures I took the camera and let it move by intuition, by chance, automatic filmmaking. It was shot at the North Sea. At that time many sea animals were dying because of a virus no one knew about - thousands of them. I saw so many sheep there and wondered if they would be next, today the seals, tomorrow the sheep.

Later I thought to photograph the sheep as if in a furious slaughterhouse, so they're shot single frame, the movement very fast. It shows a life we can no longer control. There will be a single noise and this will cause a stampede, an avalanche. We're living in a time of these movements.

■■■
There's two very separate strains in the film - one is these aggressive, dark and foreboding images, like at the beginning when the camera races through its surround and the sheep slaughter. On the other hand you show diary images, quickly cut pictures of the two of you with a very intense color. Do you feel a tension between these two parts?

TL:
These are facts. On the one hand people are dying in front of your shoes, and on the other hand you want to live a good life. This film doesn't put the moral finger in the air; it can only show the contradictions.

TOURNESOL



MH:

Was that your last film?

TL:

Now I'm working on *The Balcony*. It's about fascism. It's about twenty minutes long, I got a grant from the province so I had the money to make it. It was shot on super-8 and blown up to 16mm, so it has the beautiful colors and grain of super-8 and the brilliance of 16mm. It's a fiction about two women. The two women live

the text. When you see the pictures it's another kind of ending. It shows what goes on in the mind of the person - what they are afraid of, what could happen to assassins.

■■■

Do you feel that fascism is still here in Germany?

TL:

I feel it everywhere. The desire to control everything, to shut yourself away, to

what they felt about foreigners living in Germany and so on. And they grew. This house of neo-fascists was bought two or three years ago so they can't be ridden off. We have to live with this situation and do something about it, so I wanted to make this film.

I wanted to make a film which has a very strengthening end - that's not depressing when it's over. That was hard because in the middle you see pictures of the fight, not realistic pictures but... I put two things together, the first were great paintings of battles, and on the other hand I wanted the effect of the realistic flashlight pictures of Weegee. I wanted to combine these and make a simulation of extended flash light - to analyze how this light works by extending it to two or three seconds. Every picture of the fight is like a slow extended flash light, both still and moving. You see details of the persons in different situations. The music is very hard, very emotional, you hear machine guns and people in fury. And the end is uplifting, to have faced all of the worst and know what



Thomas Lauks, Maija-Lene Rettig, Matthias Mueller, Christiane Heuwinkel of ALTE KINDER

on this balcony, they are free, individual, they know what they want. They are living in a fascist state, talking about a situation and a story that happened or will happen. Sometimes they speak of the future and sometimes of the past. The story relates a tale of the dictator, he's called The Führer, but it's not Hitler, it's a synonym for any kind of dictator, and he wants to celebrate with a parade past the balcony on the boulevard. He wants his soldiers to conquer all the houses next to the boulevard because he's afraid of an assassination. Soldiers try to force the two women from their balcony. They refuse and try to defend their balcony. There's a fight in the night and in the end when the new day breaks they are still there, the soldiers are gone. In order not to lose face the dictator holds the parade and the women shoot him. They do what nobody could do in the Third Reich. This end exists only in

keep the foreigners out, this is everywhere.

■■■

This film seems both more dramatic and more political than your other work. Why are you making this change and how is it responding to the situation of fascism here?

TL:

It's a very concrete situation because Bielefeld is a fascist centre. They've bought a house like a castle with great wires around it. We've held many demonstrations against them but they continue to grow. There's a new party called the Republican Party who are neo-fascist. More and more people join, policemen, old people and now many young people. There didn't used to be a party, and this can easily provide the centre of this new movement. Years ago there was another party, also very small at the beginning and they said

you must do. To take the risk. Now I know the risk and I face it.

THOMAS LAUKS FILMOGRAPHY

- Public Holidays 9 min. 1985
- Tournesol 14 min. 1985
- Hotel De Bretagne 10 min. 1986
- Der Fall 5 min. 1986
- Der Park 7 min. 1986/7
- Video Bangladesh 5 min. VHS 1987
- Stampede 9 min. 1988
- 13 June 1988 3 min. 1988 (for Filmers Almanac)
- The Dew of a Heart 3 min. 1988
- The Balcony 23 min. 1989 (16mm)
- The Flamethrowers (co-author with Owen O'Toole, Schmelz dahin, Alte Kinder) 10 min. 1989/90

(All films super-8 unless otherwise noted)

O V E R T H E W A L L

OLD

CHILDREN

&

AIDS



an interview with MATTHIAS MÜLLER

MATTHIAS MUELLER is a founding member of the distribution collective ALTE KINDER (which means 'old children'). Along with Christiane Heuwinkel, Maija-Lene Rettig and Thomas Lauks, Mueller works to organize screenings, put out their catalogue and arrange tours, festival contacts and speaking engagements. Born in 1961, he began studies in art twenty years later at the University of Bielefeld. There he met Christiane Heuwinkel and Maija-Lene Rettig and began work in film. He has completed 17 films since 1983, many of which have been awarded prizes and gained great distinction. Restlessly inventive, Mueller's image rich films deal with the intersection of the private and public spheres. Working almost exclusively in super-8, his films evince a technical sophistication (multi-screen re-projection, dying/hand processing) that bely North American notions of super-8's rough and ready aesthetic. His deeply felt and elegantly constructed work around AIDS, the family, war and German romanticism mark him as one of the most important filmmakers of his generation

G E R M A N Y

MH:

How did you get interested in making film?

MM:

Very early on Christiane (Heuwinkel) and I began to go to all the various festivals in Germany. That was very inspiring for us. When we got back from the first festival we'd participated in, The Festival of Young Cinema, which is for people between 17-30, we were so inspired by the work that we called up the Kunsthalle Bielefeld and asked if they'd be interested in setting up a super-8 film show from this festival. They'd heard about us because we were given an award for our film at this festival. They were more radical then, so they financed a poster and gave us their large screening space and money for rentals and we put together a program. This program became an annual event, we did it in '83, '84, '85, and it was really incredible. One

reasonable place to present our programs. But it was a very good experience to go with these underground films to an established institution and to look for this confrontation (laughs). Normally they specialize in classics. To show recent, very innovative work which doesn't insist on being regarded as art was very exciting for us, and for the Kunsthalle too, but it became a little too exciting I'm afraid (laughs).

MH:

You remarked earlier that you were part of a new generation of super-8 filmmakers.

MM:

Yes, there was a kind of boom around 1982-83. A lot of filmmakers began to produce on super-8, and made short, provocative, aggressive works. Now one has to admit much of this work was mainstream in that they tried to adhere to Zeitgeist clichés of '82-83. They didn't survive. It used to be fashionable to work

in super-8, but times have changed. This isn't only a decline but also a kind of purification. All the people who aren't really interested in it stopped, and now only a few filmmakers continue to work like Schmelz dahin, Michael Brynntrup or Alte Kinder. And I think this is very

good for the public image of super-8, because the recent works are very good, innovative and unique, and the guage is no longer very important. When we started to work on super-8 and tour we always had to defend our guage.

MH:

Why was the guage important?

MM:

First of all it was an old, home-movie, amateur guage for fathers whose reactionary films all looked alike in a permanent repetition of themes: family, holidays, Christmas. We had to free super-8 from the cliché that it could only be used for individual memory. We always tried to present it as a medium that could be used for art. Many filmmakers didn't use it in that sense, they only copied what they'd seen. They

were a fashion: refilming off the TV, using punk music for the soundtrack and using the shaky hand camera, which became an ideological debate. People felt the shaky hand camera rendered a higher degree of authenticity, which is ridiculous. Nowadays you see this camera in every rock video; it's nothing more than a means. There's no more truth in it.

MH:

What work did you make in school at that time?

MM:

It was very diverse. There were several group omnibus films, compilation films with certain themes. We made one film which is about railways and traveling with the train, and eight or nine filmmakers participated and made short 3 or 4 minute contributions. We made another based on chance. We were sitting in front of a street map of Bielefeld and each filmmaker had a needle and closed their eyes. At the point where the needle hit the map we produced a three minute film. It was completely up to us what to do there, so it became a kind of kaleidoscope of our home town. These were studies really. It was always fun and we learned to co-operate and to speak about film and how to present our films, to organize screenings, to ask organizers of cinemas or cultural centres if they were interested in showing our work. That was very important for us.

MH:

So even at the beginning the school work was being taken outside.

MM:

Yes, that's right, we were encouraged to go outside. It was an advantage but also a problem. Our teacher tried to encourage us to produce. In order to promote productivity everything that was done was regarded as glorious, perfect and we really tried hard to get rid of this total acceptance of everything and learned how to be critical and honest and not to suppress our feelings.

MH:

Were any of the films listed in the Alte Kinder catalogue made in the school?

MM:

We don't show those films any more, they're listed in our catalogue but that's it (laughs). Sometimes people ask if they can show them and for the others it's no problem but I feel ashamed. Perhaps I



year 500 people showed up and they had to be sent home. But in the course of all this the Kunsthalle became more afraid of this art, and they didn't like the idea that very young people came, a lot of punks showed up. They became anxious and wanted to intrude on our organization, our way of presenting. We decided the price was too high, so we wouldn't continue. Meanwhile the Filmhaus Bielefeld had opened along with Cinema Lichtwerk (a film co-op) and this was a much easier and more

O V E R T H E W A L L

don't have the necessary distance. It's very difficult for me to accept older works. You can't always look back when you want to develop, and change your work, and search for new means and new contents. I made one film together with Christiane called *Wanderers in a Sea of Mist*, a title derived from a Romantic painting by Caspar David Friedrich. We made it together at home. The workshop was always available, but I like to work at home. *Wanderers* deals with romantic conceptions of life, wandering as a symbol for exploring the world. There were five strains of action interwoven with one another. We filmed it with five actors and each represented a different attitude or concept of life. It was about a search for identity, traditional romantic questions and quests which were quoted and put into new contexts. This film was very typical of our collaborations; creating small miniatures of action, very reduced, and then collaging them into a total image. It was shot in b/w and most thought it was made in 16mm because we worked a lot with the light and we tried to have images with hard contrast, a bit inspired by the photography of the twenties and Russian filmmakers (laughs). That was 1983-84. We left in 1986. We stayed for six years. At the time I had a job in the media centre at Bielefeld University giving media courses on how to edit super-8 and use video systems. It was horrible, but I could make my living for the first time.

MH:
You made *Continental Breakfast* in 1984.

MH:
Continental Breakfast was very successful but after it was over I wanted to get rid of that kind of working, with everything fixed on paper and storyboarded.

MM:

Could you describe the film?

MM: It's about a couple, a love relation and their feeling of enclosure. This hermetic relation is broken into by the

live a life as grand, as gorgeous, and meaningful as these people. After the credits crawl towards heaven you're left with your own banality. In *Continental Breakfast* the couple's actions are very



Maija-Lene Rettig,
Mathias Müller,
Thomas Lauks of
ALTE KINDER

media. *Breakfast* shows how images from the outside inform our everyday life and intimate relations.

MH:

And the way in which media can provide an escape from individual problems.

MM:

To hide from each other. You read about enormous catastrophes, wars, and your own pale experiences fade when they're set against these spectacular events.

MM:

I think this is one of the tragedies of Hollywood film, that no one could ever

banal but very intense, partly owing to its dark pulse. You've re-photographed all of the original footage from a video monitor and slowed it down.

MM:

I used video to underline this aspect of observation because video was first used in surveillance, as a method of control.

MH:

It begins with a couple in bed, the woman leaves, and the camera tracks down to watch the shape she's left on the bedspread, as if this hieroglyph could tell the story of who she is or why she's

left, to signal a distance the couple never manage to overcome.

MH:
Yes that's right. They behave like victims who aren't able to develop their own ideas but can only react. They're overwhelmed not only by the great catastrophes of the news, but also by the smallest of events, preparing breakfast. Everything is too much.

MH:
You've really managed to transform simple actions like taking a shower or pouring milk into coffee because you've slowed them down until we can see them.

MH:
I was inspired by a remark by Godard that some activities in our lives aren't visible at 24 frames per second, but only at 50 or 100 frames per second.

MH:
Yes, the camera moving over the bed is very slow and the shower scene seems as if the water itself has stopped and we're watching individual strands of water...

MH:
It was meant as a short moment of relief from this permanent tension but it's a calculated, constructed relief. It's like a dose of medicine.

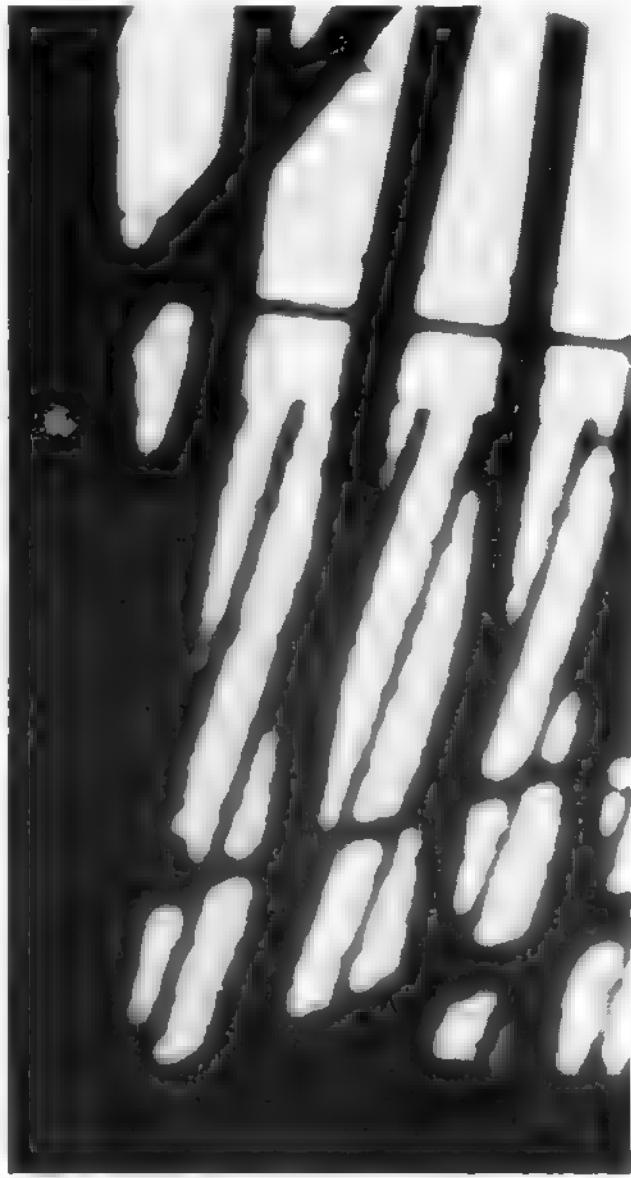
MH:
And this shot is echoed when she pours milk into coffee, it's not just one liquid dissolving into another but a spear pushed against an unyielding surface. The slowness of the movement reveals the dark underside of the apparently simple life they're leading. On the other hand there's the media collage you introduce, showing soldiers dying in the trench charges while bold newspaper headlines caption the moving image.

MH:
Yes, I wanted to give the whole film the pop art quality of a headline. I only photographed the couple head on or in profile like the police do. Then I worked with xeroxes made on plastic sheets and put them on the monitor which I was rephotographing and worked with various materials on the monitor, with gels and shaving foam (laughs) which you think is the water from the shower or the coffee pouring in the cup, it's just shaving cream on the monitor. What I like very much is when she's sitting down at the kitchen table, she's quite transparent,

you see the Venetian blinds through her, and there's an inner monologue which is put together out of film monologues - *Imitation of Life*, *Marnie* and others. She doesn't even have a voice of her own, even her inner voice is drawn from clichés. She says, going mad as Vera Miles in *The Wrong Man*: 'We close the door. We won't let anyone in.' And Tippi Hedren from *Marnie* says, 'You, me, everything is so confusing'. Lana Turner says 'All things go by, so what? All things go by.'

Most of the film shows them having breakfast. They get up from bed, eat, then the film ends with this very long aerial shot over Berlin. It's shot in 1945 and all of the buildings are ruined. This movement of the camera over the city is like the camera movement over the bed in the beginning - they're intended to make a frame. Inside the frame is their eating, which is interrupted by this historical footage and the headlines taken from the sensational London papers.

MH:
The war footage works as an extended flashback, of all that's brought them to this table, in this way. Yet these memories seem both their own and a public memory, an experience that everyone's had. So the same experience that authorizes them as individuals also joins them with a similarly affected group, with everyone else. It makes them difficult to tell apart from these disasters. It's as if life might have been possible forty years ago but not any longer, not after so much suffering. You said earlier that *Continental Breakfast* was the first film where people felt, okay, Mueller is a serious filmmaker now, where you worked under a different kind of attention, a different sort of scrutiny.



MH:

It was inspiring to see our work had friends, but *Breakfast's* success was threatening because I knew when I finished the work it wasn't what I wanted to do. It was too controlled, too didactic, too easily reduced to a sentence and too far away from my own life. I present a heterosexual couple - why don't I show the reality of my own life? Why use these old patterns, these stereotypes?

MH:

Did the recognition make a difference?

MH:

Everyone said this might be the starting point for a career as a feature filmmaker. But this was never the intention. It's always the same, you like most your

O V E R T H E W A L L



MARINA ABRAMOVIC

children who are a little handicapped, who are not so beloved. *Continental Breakfast* was loved that way, but anyone could have done it. It was just a piece of solid work and I wanted my work to become less solid (laughs) and to risk more, to be more open.

MH

What came after *Continental Breakfast*?

MH

Final Cut. In 1984 I made *Breakfast* alone, with Christiane acting and Dirk Schafer doing the sound. But with *Final Cut* in 1986 I was really alone. It was based on a plastic bag full of normal-eight home movies by my father. He'd been filming since the early '60s, the marriage of my parents, me as a child

growing up. I'd never known about this footage and when I found it, it was a strange and irritating experience to be so confronted, to see images of my father who's been dead since 1969, who I never really got to know. It was fascinating, but I felt this terrible distance, and I wanted to express this distance by refilming it on video and on super-8 again. It becomes contorted and grainy, and it looks like it's out of focus, and this was meant to express my own bewilderment.

MH:

Why did you feel irritated?

MH:

I was reminded of my childhood and all of its invisible controls and observations,

this Christian education, and these strategies of creating harmony when there was none - all these society rituals. When I saw images of their marriage everything was so stiff, it was incredible. It was just a ceremony like any of the others, only these were my parents. There was no emotion, no quality in these images, and this was the initial point for my film, treating these childhood memories. Finally, the motion of this motion picture carried me outside this familial control, outside a desire that was no longer my own.

MH

How do you show this in the film?

MH

As it nears its conclusion I burn images

of my parents. Many people who saw the film were upset and said 'How could you do this? This shows your mother and you can't treat her this way!' And I said, 'Well this is only her picture.' But people felt angry. It was strange to get these reactions.

The structure is a triptych and the final third shows my room illuminated by a window which also has three parts. In one of these parts, made by a back projection, you see a slide that appeared early in the film, a woman and two men sitting at a table looking at the camera, totally stiff and symmetrical. It appears as a kind of outlook in this room which is mine. The room undergoes many changes but this image is ever present. It indicates that you can't get completely rid of it, that parts of your personality are

Cut. There's one scene which shows my mother taking a bath in a lake by the mountains and when I saw it and tried to refilm it, I had to keep pushing the projector's loop restorer because the image trembled, shaking vertically. But I finally saw through this trembling and thought, 'That's it!' So I refilmed it this way, with this 'mistake'. The colors of this footage were a bit contorted, a bit pink and red and I refilmed on Agfa Moviechrome which has a very powerful and intense red so when I got it back, the refilmed footage was fiery red, very aggressive, full of energy and this trembling. I was reminded of a flame, so the first image of this sequence shows a flame. The image seems to be created out of a flame, it begins there. Then you see this red lake and the silhouette of my

MM

Your films are very intense and very powerful emotionally. They all progress not like a story but more like a piece of music, with themes that weave and develop.

MM:

Yes, I don't experience my own life in stories, I don't experience these continuities. I once read a sentence by Burroughs saying he would never dare to offer continuities to the reader.

MM

How do you go about structuring the work?

MM

I can only think of the step I'm involved in, I never think of the final result. This is mostly surprising for me too, and I want to keep the whole production open,

otherwise I would feel like my own employee. The final result may have nothing to do with the initial ideas. When you work with these rigid concepts, when you write everything down and have complete control you're in danger of illustrating ideas which come before the image. I spoke with a friend in Frankfurt and he said, 'Our final aim is to make films without an issue, films which cannot be reduced to content, films that do not illustrate a thought, that come after words.' I want to be surprised, shocked and astonished, I want to experience new aspects of myself when I see these films.

MM

But how...

MM

I like to make film like eating, sleeping or walking through the streets. And super-8 is the adequate medium for this. I don't want to produce 'art'.

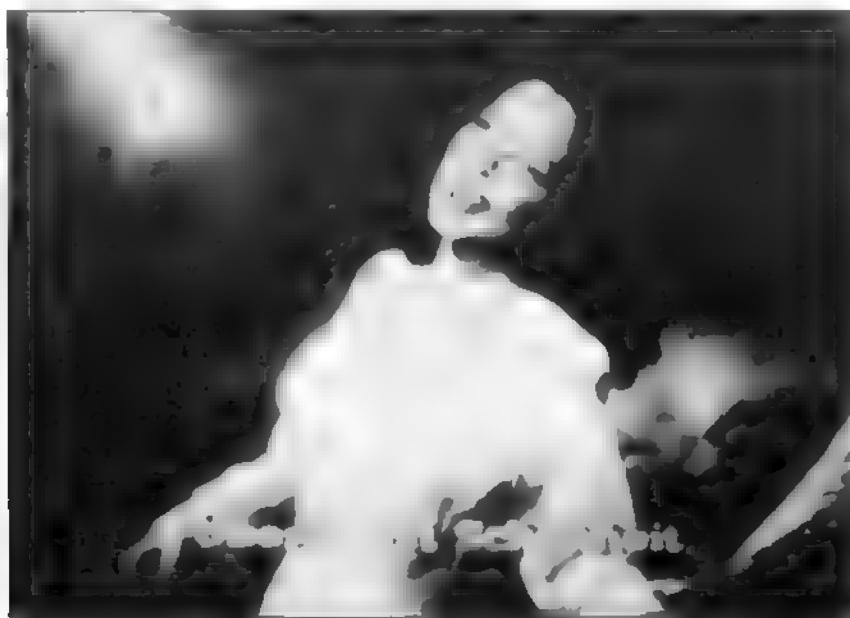
MM

Because 'art' seems separate from life?

MM

I made my last film over a year and a half and carried my camera with me wherever I went and produced a lot of footage. During the production I allowed myself everything, there was no moral control. I never thought: 'How could I use this segment? Does it fit? What does it mean?' Meaning in film often arises in

"There is beauty everywhere"



already there, that you look out from them.

MH:

It's a nice gesture to take back the images of yourself and gain control of them again. I remember suffering nights when guests were invited to watch our home movies, and we'd be naked doing stupid things in front of these strangers. These images seemed then just another mechanism of control. Our parents were presenting what they'd done, their accomplishments, like showing off a new car.

MM

That was the reason for calling it *Final*

mother and it's repeated without development, always the same, to make it feel more uncomfortable. It creates a kind of torture, a water torture. The water is red, like a flame or blood. And that made people insult me. I like my mother, so sometimes I get a bad conscience thinking I don't have the slightest reason to behave like this. When my mother saw some of my films, especially *Epilog*, she was really frightened, wondering, 'Omigod, where does this aggression come from?' Then I decided never to show her work again, there's no point. It's just upsetting and nothing more.

O V E R T H E W A L L

the montage, through association, sometimes the single segment doesn't mean much, but in connection, or repeated in other contexts, it gathers meaning. So I wanted to keep the filming as open to chance as possible. Then I try to get a certain distance which is difficult when you hand process, you develop a physical relation with your footage. It was necessary to interrupt the process. And that's when I went on my last film tour in the U.S. I was gone for a month and when I came back it wasn't that difficult to throw footage away.

MH:

How much do your films cost?

MMI

What are the costs of a film? My rent has to be paid and my food and clothes. Are these the costs of my work? I think so. When I'm working on a film I can't do a job too. I want to be able to make my living with my filmwork, that's my dream. It worked for a year because I got funding, \$10,500 for *Aus Der Ferne* and I could pay my co-workers for the first time, which was really necessary because I wanted to get rid of this self-exploitation and the exploitation of friends. Dirk Schafer has been working for weeks on the soundtrack and he's very poor, living in bad circumstances in Berlin. Now I pay him for the first time, \$1500 for all the music and mix and my friend Renia got \$500 for technical assistance and shooting.

MH:

Do you remember what *Final Cut* cost?

MMI

The material and supplies \$300-400. It's twelve minutes long. *Continental Breakfast* was \$750; *Epilog*, about \$1250. What else do you want to know? Everything?

MH:

Why Alte Kinder? It seems quite unique

MMI

I hope it is.

MMI

Whose idea was it?

MMI

It was a collective idea, a collective need. Alte Kinder was founded in 1985. 1984 had been a very creative and productive year for all of us and we all had films and saw the need to present work to the public. We were discontent to show only at festivals to an in-crowd who already knew this filmmaking. So we developed

the idea of screenings with one or two authors present. We made a catalogue, and video transfers and a poster. All of us live in Bielefeld, we'd all been working together at the Film Workshop. In the beginning we presented the program with two authors, one did the projection and one announced the films and led the discussion afterwards. It took a lot of effort and time and money so we had to get grants. We contacted the film bureau at North Rhein Westphalia and the whole thing developed momentum, but it became obvious that not everyone in the group had the same interest in distribution or was as capable presenting the work. So Christiane, Maija, Thomas and I tried to push the whole thing, and traveled a lot, and traveled with other filmmakers, and organized screenings in Bielefeld and wrote program notes and made posters, all on our initiative. It was a bit depressing that the others just took part passively, so it became necessary to rethink the structure of our group and kick the others out (laughs). In 1987 we continued with four members, which was much easier. It began in 1985 with seven members, Thomas came in 1986 and in 1987 we were only four. We also started to present the programs individually, so one of us puts together the shows, selects the films. Parallel to these initiatives in Germany we started to cooperate with the Goethe Institute. Maija went on a 1986 tour of Great Britain, Christiane was in Israel in 1988, I was in Canada and the U.S., we were in Belgium and France, etc. This became necessary for our work. We tried to build up an international network of super-8 filmmakers. There are close contacts with the Sydney group, the Montreal festival, Maija has good contacts to the Leicester super-8 festival, and we were invited to present German super-8 work at these events. This was necessary because until then screenings were engineered by one person, and he seemed to be the only expert on experimental film in Germany. His is only one view, so it was good for us to be asked to take over part of his former work.

MMI

I'm very struck just staying here for a few days that all of your lives are very connected, that Alte Kinder's not just an association of professional interests..

MMI

It's based on friendship, on long lasting relations.

MMI

Is there no point at which someone gets jealous?

MMI

It seems to be impossible to avoid this totally - you can try to reduce this idea of competition, the careerist strains, but you can't avoid it. There's always been a competition between Maija and I. I got all these prizes and Maija didn't get a single award and this was a bad situation. I almost felt ashamed of this success, so it was very good going to the art academy in Braunschweig because there Maija gets good promotion from Birgit and Wilhelm Hein. (Note: Matthias Müller, Maija-Lene Rettig, Michael Brynntrup and other noteworthy German experimental filmmakers attend classes with Birgit and Wilhelm Hein at the art academy in Braunschweig.) She's become well known and her work is well received, and she got an award at Hamburg last year, so now the contrast between our recognition isn't so great any more. There's still competition; we can't help it. We have to accept it and try not to poison personal relations.

MMI

Being able to present work under a common name seems a step in that direction, as well as putting your group name on common films, the Almanac films for instance, or *The Flamethrowers*. This does away with the myth of the author which is so pervasive in experimental film.

MMI

I had to laugh when I saw Brakhage's films. Scratching his copyright onto the end - this is such a ridiculous idea for me really, spending hours scratching his name into the emulsion (laughs). For me it was refreshing getting to know Owen O'Toole and these ideas of plagiarism and neglecting copyright and our alleged property - which is a ridiculous concept - and the alleged rights of the artist and quoting from other films. It really opened my mind.

MMI

How is Alte Kinder different now than it was before?

MMI

Our films have changed completely, along with the quality of the programs.

G

E R M A N Y

The audience has changed. We were known for these funny amusing film shows with live performances and musical interludes. It was more entertaining in the beginning and we showed our films in bars and youth centres so it was very popular. And now as the films become more difficult, we mostly show them in Kommunale Kinos and high schools and academies and art galleries. I think it's necessary for these new films to be presented in other surroundings, they need a certain concentration.

MM:

That situation seems to parallel a bit, the way early German experimental films in the '60s showed where they could, in bars or whatever, but as it became more established and more recognized it became more institutionalized and more academic.

MM:

Yeah, that's right, and we have to take care. We certainly don't want to become established. We try to reduce the distance between the screen and the audience.

(ENTER CHRISTIANE HEUWINKEL)

MM:

Why did the two of you make *Epilog* together?

MM:

We've been working together for a very long time, four or five films. It wasn't new for us. That's why we could do it without talking. There was no intellectual debate between us, no struggling, no argument.

CH:

The film began when we wrote a script for the first time. We were applying for a special grant, a Bielefeld Film Prize. We had to write a script, and we all did one, Maija, Thomas, Udo, Matthias and I - everyone worked on their own script. The grant's single provision was that the film should reflect living here in Bielefeld. As we worked on it over several months it dragged away from its original idea.

MM:

Absolutely.

CH:

When we finished the script we felt the film was finished.

MM:

It wasn't necessary to make the film any longer.

CH:

The idea stood so precisely before us we thought, 'Why should we do something that's already finished?' So we began to work with these ideas—

MM:

To transpose the idea of loss and apply it to the film material itself. The central idea of this first screenplay was the loss of most of our friends who left town.

CH:

We felt everyone wanted to leave Bielefeld and that we were the last ones left. Now we live in this town we don't like and we have to cope with it, to stay and work with it.

MM:

And search for survival. We have lost a lot of friends to the big cities who took part in the cultural life here in the early '80s, who were in our films.

CH:

We worked together with them.

MM:

Like us, they didn't get any support, so they left to try to make a living in the big cities.

MM:

So that's why you called it 'epilog' - because it comes after these people have left?

MM:

Yes, but it was not only a kind of looking back, an epilogue, to the times we shared with our friends, but also looking back to films we'd made before. We quoted from some of the earlier work we'd made together.

CH:

Epilog has to do with the possibilities of destroying pictures. When we began with our work we created pictures. But in working through *Epilog* we re-photographed a lot of our original material, we worked on the other side of the image, passing it through several generations. It was a way of destroying the original.

MM:

The film begins with a title: 'End'. And at the end a title: 'Picture Star' - when the child re-joins his parents. We wanted to have contradictory meanings in one and same image.

CH:

And the soundtrack tries to take up these ideas of counter-current movements. The sound runs backwards and forward and uses repetitions and variations of themes, like the variations in the pic-

tures.

MM:

It resembles the film *Matthias* made for the Almanac. Both show an eye in close-up, then the experience of that eye. Both focus on tiny gestures framed by an almost classical architecture. These commonplace gestures don't 'add up' in narrative fashion. Instead, they seem to speak of those intense moments of realization when the mind resolves the patterns of its exterior. In sex we say, 'I'm coming', but the mind also comes, it comes to conclusions. But while arriving at these incredible conclusions the outside is quite banal, there's nothing going on. It's in these moments that the ordinary and the fantastic rub up against one another. The visible gestures seem nearly mnemonic, serving as a trigger for these chains of realizations and associations.

CH:

It's like the way *deja vu* works, it begins with a small gesture.

MM:

We try to anticipate forthcoming events, inserting small fragments to foreshadow what's to come. We were very excited to work with this Turkish boy. We knew what he had to look like, about ten years old. We went to the school and our friend showed him to us and we regarded him on the schoolyard...

CH:

And we said, 'Yes, yes, our star.' And when we came to film he was accompanied by his sister.

MM:

Very dominant, authoritative. She told him how to act.

CH:

We filmed it in the backyard here and told him that he has to hide and to count and so on and run away. He was very serious and earnest and in the background there was his older sister always crying...

MM:

'This is bullshit, you don't know anything! I'll show you how to make it! Concentrate on your work!' Always shouting at him.

MM:

Do you always work with re-photography in your films?

CH:

It was the first time.

MM:

In *Final Cut*.

O V E R T H E W A L L

CH:

Yes. But this was the first time to work on it continuously and to try different ways of re-filming.

MH:

Do you just shoot it off the wall over here?

MM:

Yes, partly off the wall, or through transparent paper...

MM:

To give it texture.

MM:

Absolutely simple with found paper, and three projectors, two we borrowed, or projectors and slides, these were our materials.

MM:

And you're both together the whole time, loading the projectors, setting things up, talking it over...

MM:

Not talking it over, we didn't talk, we just worked. We were in a bit of a fever. We made a lot of raw material.

MH:

Did you get the money you asked for from the Bielefeld fund?

MM:

Yes. And after we finished *Epilog* one jury member saw it and said, 'I like this film but it doesn't have anything to do with your proposal.' (laughs)

MM:

And how long did it take to make?

CH:

We started in August 1987 and it was finished in Spring 1988. It took nine months, like a baby.

MM:

Christiane showed it in Israel and for the people there, there was no question that the wall in the film was the wall of Israel, and that the people on the wagons were deported Jews. So everyone has their associations—

CH: .

With their personal background.

MM: We wanted to have this openness about it, so everyone could project their own experiences on the images.

(TWO DAYS LATER)

MM:

Aus Der Ferne is your latest film. At 30 minutes it's longer than the rest, more expensively produced, and the first time you've processed all of your own images. It's a very radical work, at once the most abstract and the most personal, moving images of your own sexuality in concert with a disease which has devastated gay communities the world over.

MM:

I'm curious about the reaction from other gays, especially people suffering with HIV, because my film is a bit off the main road. The tendency is to promote living with AIDS and beating it. Solidarity is everywhere, which is okay to a certain degree, but it's become propaganda. You see all these strong powerful AIDS victims who say, 'I'm not suffering; I'm living with it, and with this disease my life has a new quality.' I can't stand it, because for me it's a lie. For me, having to die with such a disease is a horror. And I know that if I'm infected I wouldn't be able to cope with it in this way. It's a disease whose main victims are young men and this is a radical break with conventional conceptions about the

better outlook.

MM:

The film is very sensual throughout, dealing both with your body, the body of your lover, the body of the film. It all moves through this beautiful weave of light, shadow and image. The AIDS plague has made the body suspicious again, as the house of this contagion, as the place where an illicit morality and a visible punishment meet. *Aus Der Ferne* turns from the other side of the covers. Even in the park sequences where you watch the passersby from a great and alienated distance, they remain implicated in this movement from the body and back towards it. The body is never separate from the events that surround it.

MM:

Yes, and the eye is a kind of catalyst, a door between inside and out. There is no outside or inside finally, no protection, no way of hiding and closing the body. The body is translucent.

MM:

When did you decide to incorporate the images from outside - the Hollywood stuff?

MM:

It all happened in parallel. I had no storyboard. I had \$10,500 to make the



ALTE KINDER

duration of life. It was a shock for me to deal with it; the film was a kind of therapy. But I can't say that it's easier to cope with death now, not at all. It was a temporary relief but it didn't give me a

film in super-8 so I could shoot and shoot and shoot whatever I wanted. Everything happened by inspiration and association without a concept. The concept and structure came in the editing. I had all

OLD CHILDREN

&

AIDS

this footage and it all seemed to do with this experience of death. I wanted all these disparate footages to be part of the film, and give it a kind of diary style. There's one short sequence in the end where Owen O'Toole is writing a letter. I got a post from him and there was a super-8 cartridge inside and the letter read 'I'm writing this letter and I'm filming me writing this letter and I give this cartridge to you for processing and perhaps it can join your forthcoming film.' When I developed it I was absolutely overwhelmed - here was an opening to outside and co-operation. All these things which happened by chance I wanted to become part of the film. I wanted to close with a positive outlook, not a happy end exactly, but an opening.

MH

One thing you do often in your work is to fix a centre, a person, often just an eye, and then spin material in every direction, always returning to the eye. In this film the centre shifts because it shows you, the filmmaker, but also because it's your whole body, not just the outlook, the eye.

MM

Part of this was shot afterwards because I felt the need to give the heterogeneous material a structure, to pull it together somehow.

MH

Why did you feel it had to be you?

MM

I started to film with a friend, like an alter ego, but when I developed the first spools I realized this was the wrong way. It had to be an autobiographical film, and I had to be seen. So I threw it all away and started again, and asked my friend Rrenia if she could work the camera and this was much better. It was hard for me to accept me, my look, my clumsy acting. At first I searched for a friend who was very good looking, and a good actor, but I wanted to get away from this perfection, and this idea of representation. It was my experience and I didn't want it played by

someone else. I was also inspired by the diary films I'd seen.

MH

It seems important that the film bears the mark of your own hands in its processing, these marks show the movement of uncovering these images, of bringing them to light yourself, outside the factory.

MM

This film is much less calculated than all the others. It's more organic. I had this footage of my friend Mike, standing under the chandelier, from 1985. It was his first film, charming and naive, and after his death it was very touching for me to see it again and I wanted to re-animate it. That was the beginning. Then Mike became less important during the work on the film because I had to realize that I was the issue of the film, my panic and anxiety and fear of dying. I was suffering from such a deep crisis last year. I had a paranoia that I was infected, and that I had lived with the lie that I was not infected for years. From this moment everything changed completely. I couldn't speak to anyone about it. I locked the door, paralyzed by paranoia. I even developed the symptoms of AIDS. I really felt I was going to die. Then I went for the test and it was negative, I wasn't infected. It was ridiculous. But I'd never felt this experience of having to die so physically. It was so extraordinary it had to become part of the *Aus Der Ferne* film.

FROM A NOV. 10/89 LETTER BY MATTHIAS MUELLER:**Hi MIKE,**

... *Aus Der Ferne* turned out to be rather successful from the very beginning. For me this happened too suddenly given the long time I'd been working on the film. I always had the impression that I was creating something rather high-flown but it seems to have shifted to quite a popular production. I got some good reviews and - which is a slight sensation - the official predicate 'besonders wertvoll' ('very valuable'). This is grotesque. I don't know if there is a similar institution like our 'Film bewertungsstelle' in Canada. It's an official authority which puts together a jury of film experts from various fields. This jury is allowed to give certain awards to

German or international productions. The distributor of a 'valuable' film does not have to pay the whole amount of taxes, whereas the producer of a very valuable film gets some money for his next production (possibly up to 20,000 DM). And this strange jury actually decided that *Batman* was a valuable and *Aus Der Ferne* a very valuable film! It took some days to get used to this news but now I got an ugly document in our national colours black, red and gold confirming that I made this very valuable film and I am about to think it is true...

FROM A JAN. 20/90 LETTER BY MATTHIAS MUELLER:**Hi MIKE,**

Did I tell you that I turned out as this year's most ridiculous victim of German (= Prussian) bureaucracy? I got this funny award 'very valuable' and it's worth nothing. For me. This is usually connected with a grant of 30,000 DM - but my film is 13 minutes too long for a 'short film' and 50 minutes too short for a feature film. That's why I won't receive a single DM. Can you imagine how I feel?

MATTHIAS MUELLER FILMOGRAPHY

1983 *Acqua Verde* 3 min; *Nature Morte* (with Christiane Heuwinkel) 26 min; *Rapunzl* (with Christiane Heuwinkel) 15 min

1984 *Handelsklasse* 3 (with Udo Penner and Tommi Fechner) 3 min; *Es War Uberall Sehr Schon* (with Udo Penner) 3 min; *Junge Liebe* (with Udo Penner) 3 min; *Wanderer Im Nebelmeer* (with Christiane Heuwinkel) 17 min

1985 *Continental Breakfast* 19 min; *Der Psychedelische Film* 3 min; *Lustiger Kleiner Streifen* 1 min; *Danke* (with Christiane Heuwinkel) 2 min.

1986 *Final Cut* 12 min.

1987 *Waschen, Schneiden, Legen* 7 min; *Epilog* (with Christiane Heuwinkel) 16 min.

1988 *The Filmers' Almanac* (June 10) 3 min

1989 *Aus Der Ferne* 27 min.

1989/90 *The Flamethrowers* (co-author with Owen O'Toole, Schmelz dahin, Alte Kinder) 10 min.

STAFF CHANGES

This issue represents MIKE HOOLOOM's last major project as Experimental Film Officer at the CFMDC. He left the Centre on Valentine's Day (the one that was mysteriously moved to the second week of March) to spend more time on his film work. In his two and a half years as Film Officer, Mike has worked tirelessly to promote the Experimental film collection, establishing a coherent database of information on films, filmmakers and clients, developing new venues for the work, and raising the profile of both the Centre and its filmmakers. His dedication, enthusiasm and intelligence will be greatly missed. We will also miss his forthright manner - a combination and sincerity and commitment that often got him into trouble for his outspokenness and unwillingness to shy away from controversial issues. We can only hope that he continues to bring the admirable qualities to his filmwork that he has brought to his work as Film Officer. From everyone at the Centre, best wishes, Mike.

The new Experimental Film Officer is DARIA STERMAC, chosen from a field of over 50 applicants after an exhaustive interview process with the 6 shortlisted candidates. A filmmaker and writer with an honours B.A., Fine Arts/Film major from York University, Daria has a varied background that includes everything from co-production/direction/

writing credits on the popular (and Genie-winning) film *I Need a Man Like You To Make My Dreams Come True* (among others) to associate editing experience with the *Fireweed Literary Journal*. She brings with her an irrepressible enthusiasm and extensive knowledge of independent and experimental film activity here and abroad.

FRAME ENLARGEMENTS

The CFMDC has acquired a lens attachment that allows us to make single-frame enlargements from 16mm films using a 35mm still camera. We are now in the process of making stills for all of the films in the collection that do not already have them. Filmmakers will be charged \$5 per film to create a negative and first print (additional prints would be cheaper). This is an extremely inexpensive cost (made possible by doing many films in a single shoot) to provide visual material that is essential to promoting a film. Charges will come off of filmmakers' upcoming payment from the Centre (in June 1990). Any filmmakers having difficulties with this policy should contact PAUL COUILLARD at the CFMDC.

FILM FUND

THE LIAISON OF INDEPENDENT FILMMAKERS TORONTO (LIFT) and THE ONTARIO FILM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (OFDC) are pleased to announce THE MULTICULTURAL DRAMATIC FILM FUND. The project, initiated by the OFDC and administered by LIFT, is to provide grants to independent dramatic filmmakers from visible cultural and/or linguistic minorities. Note: film projects need not be about minority issues, and the definition of drama will include innovative approaches. Projects from across Ontario are eligible. The fund totals \$85,000 per year for a two-year period. Applicants may apply for up to 75% of their total budget, with a maximum request of \$20,000. Recipients will be selected by a jury process. The application deadline is May 1, 1990. For further information contact Lloyd Wong at LIFT, 345 Adelaide St. W., Toronto, Ontario, M5V 1R5 or call (416) 596-8233.

SUBMISSIONS

THE INDEPENDENT EYE invites submissions to its next issue, which will be devoted to reviews of films and film books. Deadline: April 15, 1990. Submissions should be typed or may be submitted on disk (using Macintosh Microsoft Word). For more information, contact MIKE ZRYD c/o CFMDC or call (416) 978-8574.

UPCOMING AGMS

The Annual General Meeting of the INDEPENDENT FILM AND VIDEO ALLIANCE will be held May 15 - 19 in Toronto. Special workshops are planned to mark the 10th Anniversary of the organization, as well as curated screenings of independent film and video work from across Canada. Anyone wishing more information on the conference can contact either MICHAEL BALSER or PAT JEFFRIES c/o V/TAPE, 183 Bathurst St, first floor, Toronto, Ontario, M5T 2R7 or at (416) 360-7020.

ANNPAC/RACA will also be holding its AGM in Toronto this year, June 7 - 9, scheduled to coincide with IMAGES 90, the Canadian independent film and video festival. Members of any ANNPAC organization are allowed to attend the AGM as observers; any CFMDC member wishing more information should contact PAUL COUILLARD at CFMDC

IMAGES 90

IMAGES 90 will take place at the EUCLID THEATRE in Toronto between June 7 and 12, 1990. This is the third annual festival of Canadian independent film and video organized by NORTHERN VISIONS. This year will be

A N U C M N T S
N O N E E
↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

their largest festival yet, with a record number of Canadian and regional premieres. In addition to selections chosen through an "open call" jury selection, IMAGES 90 will feature curated programs by PAUL WONG, KAREN KNIGHTS, LORETTA TODD and HELENE ROY as well as two retrospective presentations: a look at video artist SARA DIAMOND's work of the 80s (organized by LEILA SUJIR) and the best work to come out of the NEWFOUNDLAND FILM CO-OP (organized by BRUCE PARSONS). Six professional-level workshops held in conjunction with the festival will focus on developing the expertise of the independent scriptwriter and (self) pro-

ducer. The workshops will cover topics ranging from script development to "making the deal". For more information, contact the Northern Visions office at 67A Portland St., Suite 3, Toronto, Ontario, M5V 2M9 or call (416) 971-8405.

TOURS AND SPECIAL SCREENINGS

A number of films from the Centre are currently being screened in different parts of the country through CFMDC-sponsored tours. "A LITTLE

OLDER: THE ATLANTIC TOUR" is being screened in six places across the Maritimes while the "WET, WILD AND ALONE" and "CINEMA OF DEATH" tours are making their way across Ontario. Also of note: A major series of Canadian avant-garde work is scheduled for SCRATCH CINEMA in Paris and CANADA HOUSE in London. Curated by CATHY JONASSON (head of the Film Department at THE ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO), these screenings will include work by RICK HANCOX, PHILIP HOFFMAN, DAVID RIMMER and OTHERS. This program has been organized by JILL MCGREAL, the AV Officer at Canada House

HALLWALLS CONTEMPORARY ARTS CENTER

BERLIN: IMAGES IN PROGRESS, CONTEMPORARY BERLIN FILMMAKING, edited by Jurgen Bruning and Andreas Wildfang, is the catalogue accompanying the Hallwalls touring film exhibition of the same title, curated by the editors and featuring films by Michael Brinrup, Penelope Buitenhuis, Michael Krause, and Katarina Peters. Essays and interviews by the editors, Karen Rosenberg, Birgit Hein, Steff Ulrich, Madeleine Leskin, Torsten Alisch, Niels Kruger, Katarina Peters, Masud Rajai, and Andreas Dohler. Now, as a special offer to *The Independent Eye* readers, **BERLIN: IMAGES IN PROGRESS** is available for \$6 Canadian, plus \$1.80 Canadian for shipping; in the States, \$6 US, plus \$.65 for shipping. The films in the touring program are also available for rental by contacting Jurgen Bruning, Hallwalls Film Curator.

Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Center is a non-profit, artist-run organization dedicated to the presentation and production of new works by regional and international emerging artists in media, as well as in the visual, performing, and literary arts. Upcoming media programs include *Under the Mainstream: Five Attacks on Your American Eyes*, featuring in-person presentations by young American independent filmmakers; video/performance by **Constance DeJong & Tony Oursler**; and 15-20 hours of live, interactive cablecasts of site- and community-specific work by visiting-artists **Stadtwerkstatt** from Austria. Call Hallwalls for more information.





The Ontario Arts Council offers grants to professional artists who are residents of Ontario, working in the following media:

PHOTOGRAPHY & HOLOGRAPHY PROJECTS

- assistance for new projects or work-in-progress
Deadlines: February 1, August 15

PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION ASSISTANCE

- exhibition assistance towards the cost of an upcoming exhibition
Deadlines: February 15, April 15, June 15, August 15, October 15, December 15

VIDEO

- to assist with the production of original video art
Deadlines: February 1, August 15

ELECTRONIC MEDIA

- to facilitate creation of works of art using electronic media;
to facilitate research of potential significant benefit to the arts community into the creative possibilities of electronic media
Deadlines: May 1, December 1

FILM

- to assist with the production of documentary, dramatic, animated or experimental films
Deadlines: April 1, November 1

SCREENWRITING

- to encourage the creation of dramatic screenplays
Deadline: February 1

For information and application forms, contact:
Film, Photography and Video Office
ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
151 Bloor Street West, Suite 500
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1T6
(416) 961-1660
Toll-free 1-800-387-0058 (Ontario only)

NEW ZEALAND 1990

COMING
ATTRACtIONS

ZILCH!

Sam's in big trouble . . .
it's because of telephones and tomatoes.
Richard Riddiford's new film
is about passion, greed and blackmail

FLYING FOX

IN A
FREEDOM
TREE

A film about crime,
marriage, money,
success . . . and how
none of them can
satisfy Pepe. A film by
Martyn Sanderson

USER Friendly



Does the little wooden
dog contain the secret
of everlasting life? An
action comedy from
award-winning director
Gregor Nicholas.



RUBY & RATA

From Gaylene
Preston, director of
the acclaimed MR
WRONG, a story of
two women with
nothing in common
. . . except Willie

FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF JANET FRAME To THE ISLAND

DIRECTED BY JANE CAMPION

After SWEETIE (in competition, Cannes 1989),
Jane Campion films three "wonderfully
evocative" tales of childhood and growing-up.



Someone keeps
making love to Alan
— he's trying to find
out who.
An erotic
thriller from
director
John Day

Te Rua



They challenged Berlin . . . From
award-winning director Barry
Barclay (NGATI) a drama
involving theft, activists, and treasures.



One man had
conscience. The other,
spirit. Together they
stood against the call
to arms. An epic from
the Gibson Group.

all proudly supported by the

NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION

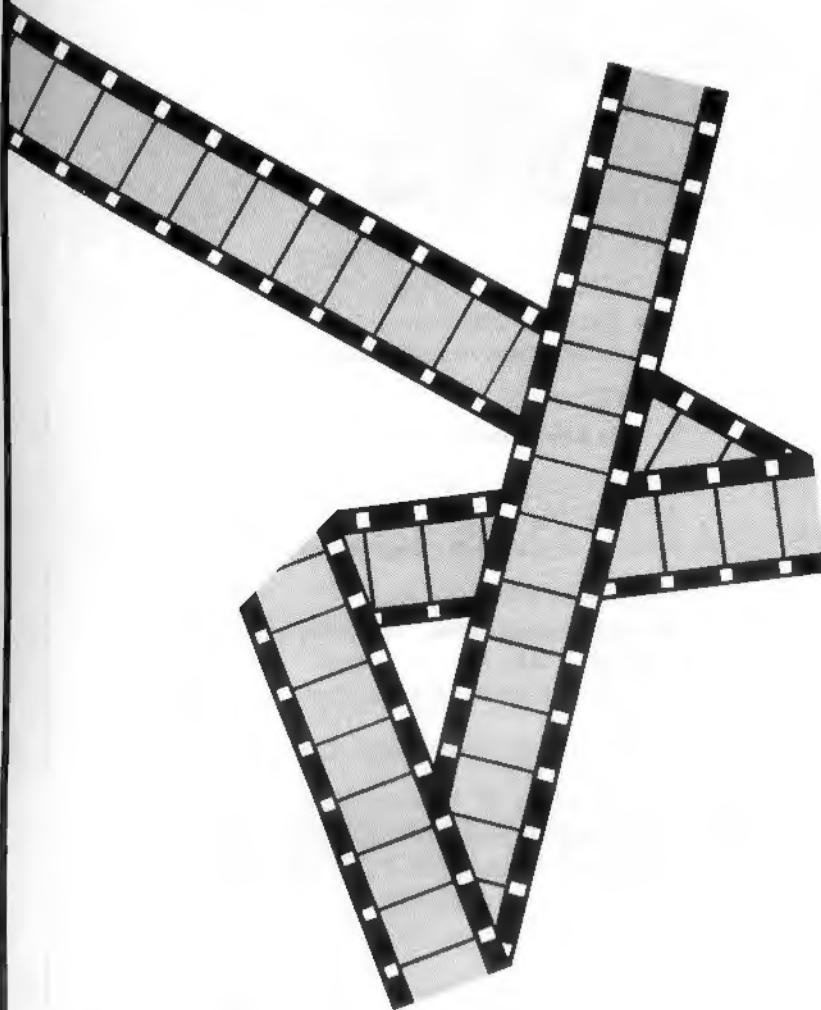
P.O. Box 11-546, Wellington. Tel (64-4) 859-754. Fax (64-4) 849-719.
36 Allen St, Wellington. Telex NZ30386 FILMCOM.

The National Gallery of Canada

Le Musée des beaux-arts

The Video and Film by Artists Series

An ongoing program of exhibitions of the
work of independent filmmakers



For more information: / Pour plus d'information :

Susan Ditta

Assistant Curator Video and Film /
Conservatrice adjointe des films et bandes vidéo

(613) 990-8611

La Série de vidéos et films d'artistes

Un programme continu d'expositions
d'œuvres de cinéastes indépendants

Michael Snow

Ellie Epp

Brenda Longfellow

Rick Hancox

Frances Leeming

Mike Hoolboom

Joyce Wieland

Ellen Bessen

Midi Onodera

Peg Campbell

Bonnie Devlin

David Rimmer

Phil Hoffman

Richard Kerr

Bruce Elder

Jim Anderson

Chris Gallagher

Patricia Grueben

Julian Samuel

Barbara Sternberg

Annette Mangaard

Patrick Jenkins

Ed Ackerman

National Gallery
of Canada

Musée des beaux-arts
du Canada

380, promenade Sussex Drive, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 9N4

A U R O R A A U S T R A L I S

Film & Photographic Works



Film still from
Square Bashing, Stephen Harrop

FILM WORKS

PROGRAMME ONE:

serious undertakings, Helen Grace
History Takes Place, Sonia Leber
ec/static, Toula Anastas
Camera Natura, Ross Gibson

PROGRAMME TWO:

Carumba, Nick Meyers
Waterfall, Arthur & Corinne Cantrill
Square Bashing, Stephen Harrop
One View, Maggie Fooke, Chris Knowles
White Woman, Anne-Marie Crawford
Tales from Vienna Hoods, Marcus Bergner
S.S.S., Andrew Frost

PROGRAMME THREE:

The Rational Life Films, Debbie Lee
Salt, Saliva, Sperm and Sweat, Philip Brophy

PROGRAMME FOUR:

In This Life's Body, Corinne & Arthur Cantrill

PROGRAMME FIVE:

Adaptor, Michael Hill
A Song of Ceylon, Laleen Jayamanne

PROGRAMME SIX:

Nice Coloured Girls, Tracey Moffatt
A Song of Air, Merilee Bennett
Too Many Captain Cooks, Penny McDonald

PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS

Julie Brown-Rrap • Dennis Del Favero • Anne Ferran • Hewson/Walker

A project curated by Ann Pollock Berecrys and Karen Love, and organized by Presentation House Gallery with assistance in Vancouver from The Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr College of Art & Design, The Vancouver Art Gallery, and Women in Focus.

April 9 to 21

FILM WORKS, hosted by The Charles H. Scott Gallery, Emily Carr College of Art & Design
Screenings and special events schedule available

April 7 to May 27

PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS: at Presentation House Gallery, North Vancouver
Special events schedule available

The project is generously sponsored by The Australia Council, The Australian Film Commission, The Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade/Government of Australia, The Canada Council, Canadian Freightways Limited, Hemlock Printers Ltd., The North Vancouver Community Arts Council, Preferred Service Customs Brokers Inc., Qantas Airways Limited, and Total Graphics.

P R E S E N T A T I O N H O U S E G A L L E R Y

333 Chesterfield Avenue, North Vancouver, B.C. V7M 3G9 (604) 986-1351

**SUMMER
INSTITUTE**
1 . 9 . 9 . 0
**CENTRE FOR
THE ARTS**
**SIMON FRASER
UNIVERSITY**
**VANCOUVER
BRITISH COLUMBIA**

FILM SOUND INTENSIVE
THE ART OF FILM SOUND

TWELVE DAYS - JUNE 11 TO JUNE 23

Faculty: Martin Gotfrid, Patricia Gruben,
Iain Macanulty

Guest Lecturers: Claudia Gorbman, Colin Browne,
Michael Conway Baker,
Amin Bhatia, Haida Paul

The art of putting sound to picture. Presented through 35mm Dolby screenings, seminars and demonstrations by experienced professionals.

For filmmakers, composers and advanced students.

Location: SFU Harbour Centre
In downtown Vancouver

VISUAL ART INTENSIVE
THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

THREE WEEKS - JUNE 18 TO JULY 6

Faculty: Mary Kelly, Constance Penley,
Hal Foster, Allyson Clay

Lectures, seminars and critiques focus on contemporary discourses of feminism, psychoanalysis, critical art practice, and popular culture.

**For practising artists and writers
as well as advanced students.**

Location: Downtown Vancouver
at 112 W. Hastings

For more information on any of the Intensives, contact:

Angela Crump, Coordinator, 1990 Summer Institute
Centre for the Arts, Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, B.C. V5A 1S6
(604) 291-4672

1 . 9 . 9 . 0
INTENSIVES
D A N C E
F I L M S O U N D
M U S I C
V I S U A L A R T
V O I C E



The Goethe-Institut has 149 centres world wide and 3 in Canada. We offer:

- Cultural events in the areas of:
film
music
visual arts
theatre and performance
modern dance
literature
history
- German language courses in Canada and Germany
- Full range of library services
- Information and classroom aids for teachers of German

For more information contact us at:

Goethe-Institut Toronto
1067 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario
M4W 2L2
Tel : 416 / 924-3327
Fax: 416 / 924-0589

Goethe-Institut Montreal
418 Sherbrooke Street E.
Montreal, Quebec
H2L 1J6
Tel : 514 / 499-0159
Fax: 514 / 499-0905

Goethe-Institut Vancouver
944 West 8th Avenue
Vancouver, B.C.
V5Z 1E5
Tel : 604 / 732-3966
Fax: 604 / 732-5062